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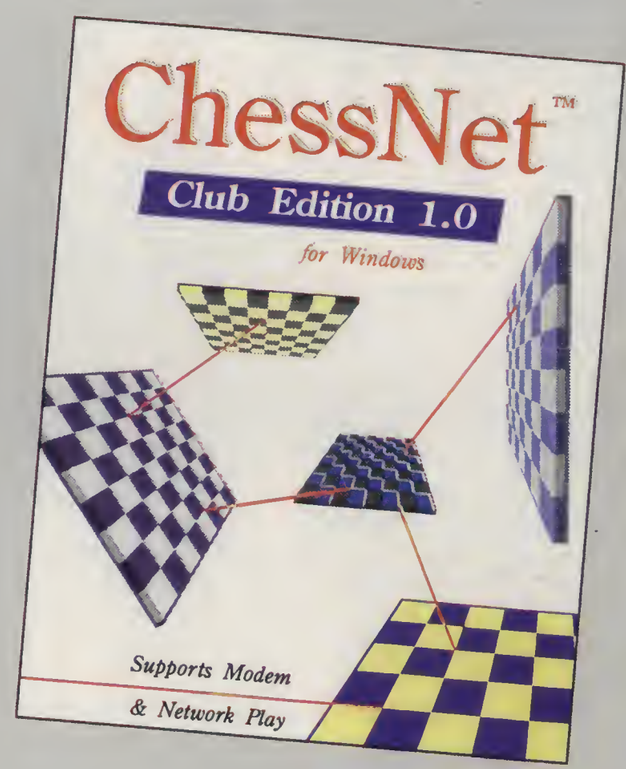

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COMPUTER GAMES STRATEGY PLUS

Number 25
December 1992

REGULARS AND FEATURES

4 Contents
What you're now reading!

6 Upfront
25 today! A nostalgic wallow

9 News
Electronic Arts eats a fish, Spectrum Holobyte in the malls

13 Real Soon Now
Preview quickies

15 Comanche Maximum Overkill
NovaLogic's David Holmes introduces a revolutionary new helicopter sim

17 Pacific War
Brian Walker previews Gary Grigsby's new game

84 Book review
Steve Wartofsky reads the guide to Jetfighter II

94 Hardware
Michael Cassara listens to the AdLib Gold

STRATEGY

18 Air Bucks
Mike Woodhouse samples the duty frees

20 La Grande Armee
Stuart Mitchell goes nap

22 XTank
Richard Lawrence in the wonderful world of UNIX

27 Harpoon II
Three Sixty's Carl Norman on features for Harpoon II

32 Capture the Flag
John Harrington seizes some super shareware

35 Star Legions
'Stellar' says Mike Woodhouse

38 VGA Planets
Jenifer Schlickbernd boldly goes where no woman has...

40 Strategy in Siege
Bruce Schlickbernd gets a foot in the door

44 Carriers at War Replay
Gerry Dorris replays the Battle of Midway. And wins! 'What a hero', say all the girls

87 Great Naval Battles
Peter Szymonik in the North Atlantic. Well, Conneticut anyway

ADVENTURE

50 Cobra Mission
Steve In the Realm of the Senses' Wartofsky, discusses Japanese eroticism in our centrefold special

52 Spellcasting 301
Greg Ellsworth visits Ft Naughtytail

57 Spellcraft
Theo Clarke visits stone(d)henge, maaaan!

60 Mantis
Richard Lawrence and the Pittsburgh Penguins

64 Lure of the Temptress
Theo Clarke takes the bait. Fish, fish, I smell fish!

68 Block buster - Forge of Virtue
Doug Jacoby solves it!

70 Quest for Glory III
Joseph Boone and life with the lions, concluding our animal special

SPORTS

74 Pro League Baseball
Joseph McCullough on the mound

78 Sports Locker
Joseph McCullough now in the clubhouse

82 Tom Landry Strategy Football
John Harrington takes Uncle Tom's advice. Tom does'nt.

SIMULATIONS

90 Commander Crunch
The commander gets expansion fever. Red Baron and Jetfighter II provide the cure

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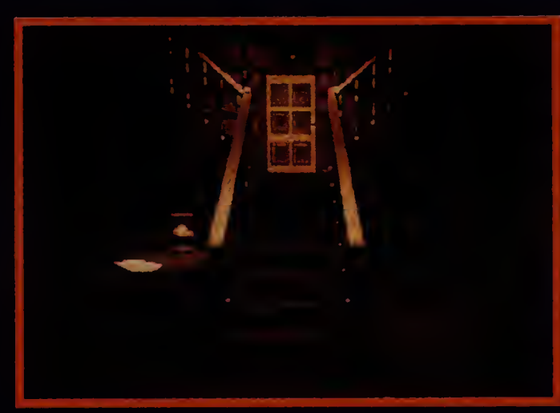

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Reader Service No. 5

It's all in the game. Or is it? The art of game design is one that should not be under estimated and yet in the leisure software business it is still one that suffers from neglect. This might seem strange, for if it is neglected then how do games ever get produced? The key here is to understand the difference between games and programs.

A (leisure software) program without a game design is like a boat without a rudder. It will look very pretty and run and run, but with no particular sense of direction. In the early days of computer games there were many such programs, as one would expect from an industry in its infancy. Improvements have been gradual, part of the reason for this is that software companies have been exploiting the rich legacy of design that boardgames left. The esteemed **Harpoon** was originally a set of miniatures rules published by GDW; **Railroad Tycoon** owed a debt to Avalon Hill's **1830**, while one of the classic strategy games, SSG's **Reach for the Stars**, bore more than a passing resemblance to another Avalon Hill game **Stellar Conquest**. Meanwhile, SSI mined the seam of Avalon Hill's wargame back catalog to good effect.

Many designers and producers now working in the software business have a boardgames background. Bruce Shelley of Microprose had an illustrious career at Avalon Hill, while many of that companies designers worked for TSR and SPI during the heyday of boardgame. In the UK, Games Workshop, who used to produce boardgames before they moved exclusively into tabletop fantasy, have also been providing talented game designers to the software industry of late.

To further emphasise the difference between programming and game design, it is worth noting that many game designers working for software companies know absolutely nothing about programming. On the face of it this might sound astonishing, but upon reflection, why should they need to? Their job is to come up with the design that programmers can turn it into a game. Programmers that can *genuinely* do both are rare indeed. The Bullfrog team (**Populous**, **Powermonger** et al) are possible exceptions but only because they redefined the parameters of what constitutes a game.

So far, I haven't mentioned the role of producer in all of this. The producer is a somewhat nebulous figure with wildly varying job specifications. But in general terms their role is not entirely unlike their counterpart in the movie business; bring the product in on time and don't let the budget go through the roof. A good producer will have a knowledge of game design and offer input to the programming team. Whether or not this advice is heeded depends on the intransigence level of said team.

Despite all this, one can still see programs masquerading as games. Often a perusal of the manual can help define the difference between a program and a game. Beware of slender documents which do little more provide a description of what things do rather than the effect they have. This is not to say that any game containing less than a Microprose-style tone is worthless, just think of it as a rule of thumb.

Beware too of elaborate themes without any clearly defined goals. Usually these are accompanied by pretty pictures and menus, all offering the illusion that something is occurring. The realisation that nothing is occurring will follow shortly.

The good news is that slowly but surely the value of a good game designer has become apparent to all but the most blinkered software houses. This is apparent in the increase in quality, particularly in strategy games, that the industry has experienced over the last two years. There is no reason to think that this trend will not continue, for while many companies see themselves committed to the pursuit of excellence, there is no doubt too that they are keenly aware that quality sells.

Campaign '92

Although it arrived too late for review, we ran Cineplay's **Power Politics** in computer manager mode to see what it made of the forthcoming circus. The result was as follows: Clinton 39.4% Bush 31.8? Perot 28.7%. It should be said that the stats for Perot were programmed prior to his remarkable pull-out and subsequent 'pull-in'. Time as they, say, will tell.

Mama

Readers may note that there is no 'Mama Sez column this issue. This is because the poor dear (aka Joan McKeown) was taken into hospital where she underwent emergency surgery. I'm sure you'll all join me in wishing her a speedy recovery. ❑

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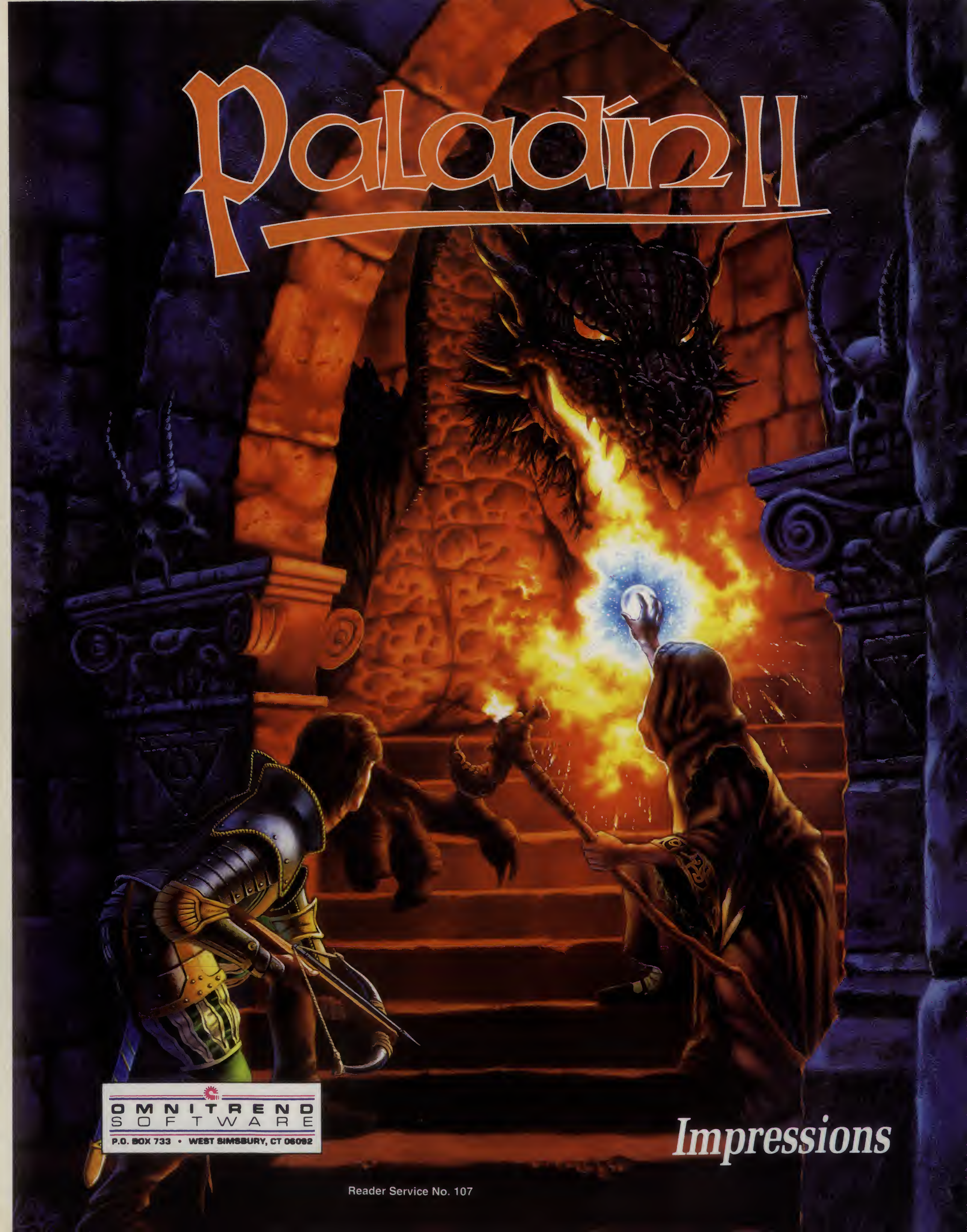
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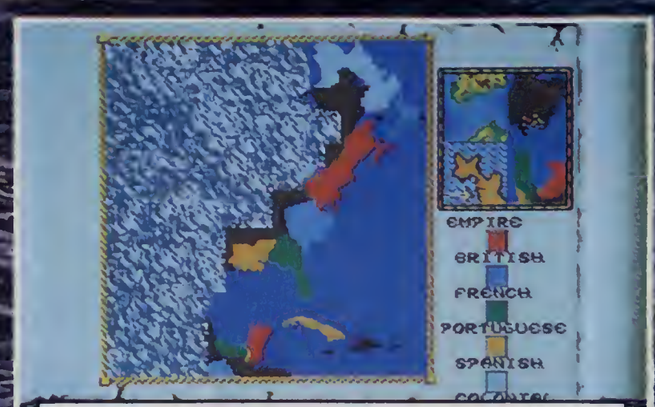

Watch your empire grow.

You will need to fight off pirates and more!

Impressions

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Reader Service No. 107

Electronic Arts Buys Origin

In a deal estimated to be worth $35 Electronic Arts bought all the outstanding securities of Origin in exchange for 1.3m shares. Origin were founded in 1983 by the brothers Garriot and experienced early success with the **Ultima** role playing series.

Recently the company has been one of the pioneers of new technology in the PC market with **Wing Commander** and the soon-to-be-released **Strike Commander**.

Following the deal, Robert Garriot will continue in his role as Origin's president while brother Richard will become a VP and executive producer at EA. Commenting on the deal, EA's president Larry Probst had this to say: 'It will help launch Electronic Arts into the CD market and enhance Electronic Arts position as the leading worldwide independent publisher of entertainment software.'

Reflecting Origins position, president Robert Garriot commented: 'While Origin's financial track record continues to be strong, both Origin and Electronic Arts see their long term strategies for the entertainment industry best served together'. What this means is that Origin will now get a bigger share of the cartridge market while EA will make inroads into CD ROM. Origin will continue to operate from their Texas base as an autonomous subsidiary of EA.

The Ancient Art of War in the Skies: destined for the modern art of CD ROM

Microprose Go CD Rom

Microprose have signed an agreement with MMC development which gives MMC the CD ROM rights to more than 30 of Microprose's titles. These include **Silent Service II**, **Red Strorm Rising**, **Railroad Tycoon**, and the more recent **Ancient Art of War in the Skies**.

The first Microprose titles to be released on the fledgling format will be the compilations **Land, Sea, and Air 1 & II**, **Microprose's Great Adventures**, and **Megatraveller** (includes I & II). All the conversions will be shovelware, though each disk will contain more than one title.

Grand slams in

Just in time to miss our Bridge feature, Electronic Arts announce the release of **Grand Slam Bridge 2**. Actually, they didn't announce it. After begging their wondrous PR department for information, they took pity and revealed that the game would be hit the stores 'in November'. But lo and behold! No sooner had they gone off to a three hour lunch than one of our writers espied the very same game in a local store!

But on with the show. **Grand Slam 2** uses a top down view of a card table using North, South, East and West seats. The program is aimed at both advanced and beginner levels and is capable of dealing over one billion random hands. Blimey! Even old smarmy chops Sharif would have a job coping with that lot. For beginners, **Grand Slam Bridge 2** offers 20 tutorial hands which teach general bidding and playing strategies written by bridge expert Mike Lawrence.

Bridge hustler Corey Cole rated the original program highly in his round-up of Bridge games in this magazine. The only drawback, he claimed, were the CGA graphic and keyboard interface. This has now been in the put to right as the program supports VGA and a mouse. **Grand Slam Bridge 2** is in the shops now. Could someone tell EA's PR department?

Down the upgrade path

Siege editor (Public Domain)

This editor will allow players to change troop names, attributes and weapons and will also let allow wizards to pass through walls, fire elementals throw fireballs, make skeleton warriors harder to kill (again), change the names of troop types to recreate battles (for the *Middle Earth* fans) and more. Will only work with version 1.2 Note: this is a Public Domain program and not available from Mindcraft

Dynamix

Aces in the Pacific Patch B

This patch fixes everything except the budget deficit. Too many features to list hear, suffice to say that anyone who has the game shouldn't be without this.

Access

Links 386 pro Version 1.07 Executable (IBM/ VGA)

This is the new version of the **Links 386 Pro** executable. It is dated 9/29/92 and is Version 1.07. Link107.Txt file will need to be obtained to get the numerous switch settings for use in correcting some hardware conflicts.

Sierra On-Line

Quest for Glory III Magic User Patch (IBM)

This patch addresses a problem in **Quest for Glory 3** in the

Before you play Special Forces, you'd better put on your game face.

When your drop-point is smack in the middle of fierce enemy forces, you'd better dress for the occasion.

That's why, in *Special Forces*, you're equipped with high-powered rockets. Rapid-fire pistols. Rifles. Grenades. And whatever it takes to secure your objective quickly.

Your objective? Today it could be rescuing a POW. Tomorrow, sabotage or cutting off enemy supply lines.

But you can't do it all alone. So take along your pick of the military's elite commandos to help you. Specialists who you'll have creating diversions, sniping, setting off explosives, jumping enemies, and carrying out your master strategy.

Special Forces from MicroProse. Defeat is not an option. What you wear is up to you.

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Reader Service No. 5

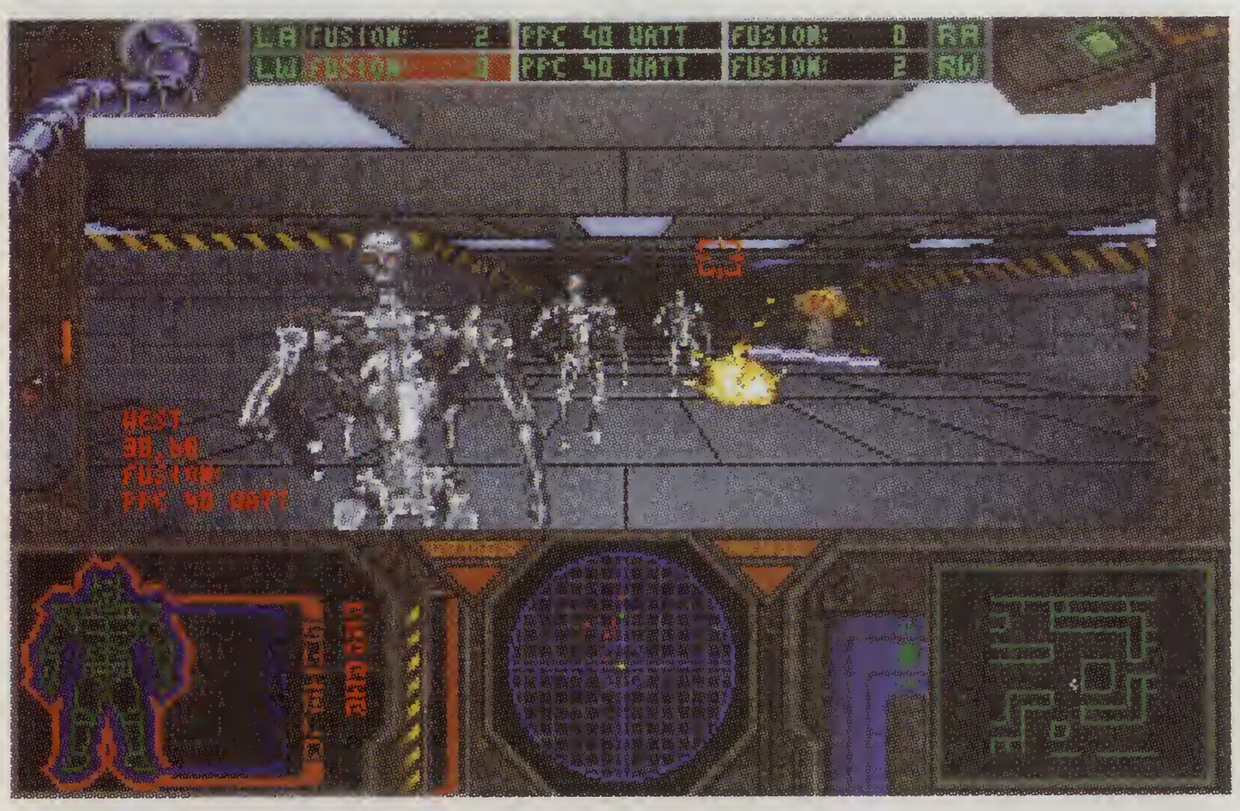
Battle Isle Development

Ubi Soft announce the release of the first expansion disk for their strategy game **Battle Isle**. Amazingly, this is called **Battle Isle Scenario Disk Vol 1**. The new disk will include 34 new maps, of these 25 will be available for play against the computer while the remaining 9 will be for two (human) player use only. New terrain such as arctic wastelands, barren deserts, and raging rivers will also be included on the disk.

Remember **B.A.T.**? Most players tried to forget it. With this no doubt in mind, Ubi Soft have elected to call the follow-up **The Koshan Conspiracy**. But fear not, the BATS (Bureau of Astral Troubleshooters) are back and with a few surprises up their sleeve, namely the Biodirectional Organic Bioputer which is implanted in the arm of each agent.

Included in the game are four flight simulators plus a driving simulator, and an arcade with three playable coin-op games. Both these products should be available now.

Total Recoil!



Los Angeles (or what's left of it), 2029 AD. This is the setting for **The Terminator 2029**, a sophisticated shooter from Bethesda Softworks. The player takes the role of one of John Connor's Special Operations Group who has been chosen to wear the Advanced Combat Armour designed by Gianni Versace Jr (boots by Doc Martin).

The Special Operations Groups (SOG) is determined to wipe out the Skynet Assault Forces with the ultimate aim being to destroy Skynet itself.

Naturally enough this leads to all the gratuitous violence in 3D animated graphics that one could possibly hope for, *and* spread over 20,000 map locations (count 'em). Nineteen missions are included in the game, none of which have a predetermined ending. Play features include: promotions in rank, status of all weapon systems at a glance, independent targeting acquisition systems allowing accuracy down to one pixel - if you can see it, you can kill it. - and finally, the option to `get mission briefings and execute them' (take that, you horrible mission briefing!).

Can they give it away?

When the CDTV was first launched Commodore refused to let computer retailers stock the machine (in the UK, at least). It was a 'brown goods' product they argued, and as such should be placed alongside VCR's and TV's in high street chains. Now, Commodore are offering the machine free with a purchase of an Amiga 3000.

When asked what the hallowed machine could do, Commodore's UK head of marketing, Steve Franklin, replied at the time of the launch: 'It can do everything'. Everything, it seems, except sell.

Royals in new scandal shock!

A new scandal hit the beleagured reign of King Dacre of Mittledorf when it was rumored that he'd topped (or 'murdered' as they say in Mitteldorf) his own brother to gain the throne. A palace spokesman (there are no women) refused to comment. Not surprising as half the town has disappeared. Could the black plague be responsible, or has everyone scarpered because they are sick to death of hearing about so-called 'royal families'? This is part of the storyline (the rest we made up) for **Legends of Valour**, the new adventure game from SSI that uses a first person perspective. The player's task is to discover what's going on. Good luck!

Leopardman Village that prevented one of the planned puzzle solutions. Only needed when playing a Magic User character.

MicroProse

Gunship 2000 Islands and Ice Update (IBM)

This patch corrects the Replay and SoundBlaster compatibility problems. It also lowers the memory required to run the game. Included is a Memory Program to check the memory while running the game. Please refer to the accompanying text file. Note: This update is for the Scenario Disk Version only.

Darklands Update Version 05/051 to 06 (IBM)

Update updates version 05 and 051 to 06. It has a few new features added, fixes various machine compatibility problems, corrects problems found in earlier versions, and includes new and/or revised artwork for certain areas of the game.

Darklands Update Version 04 to 06 (IBM)

Does the same as above except for version 04

Note: Unless otherwise stated, all of the above upgrades are available free to registered users and may also be obtained from commercial bulletin boards such as CompuServe and GENie.

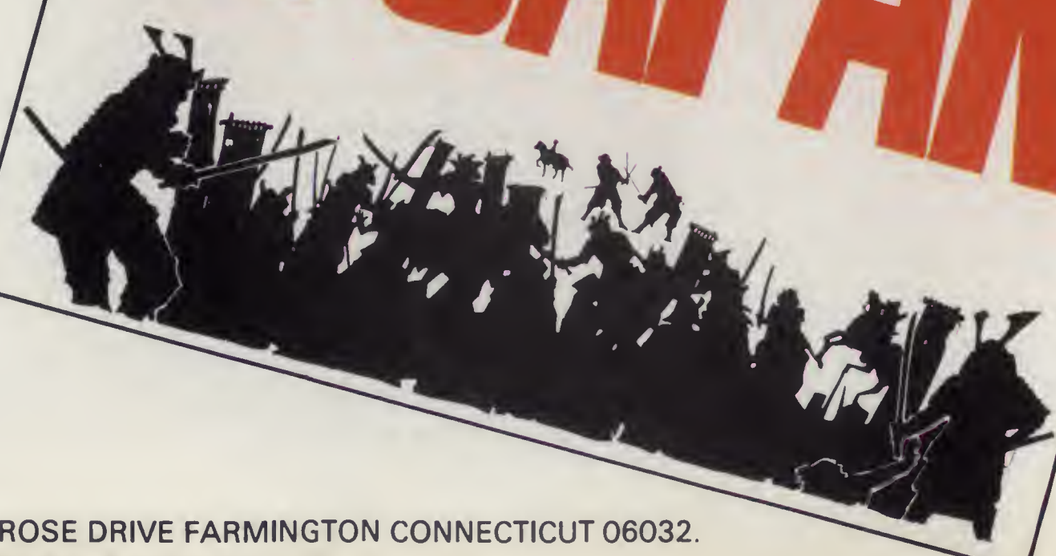
DON'T GET MAD...

Watch with pride as your warriors move into intricate formations (HIGH RESOLUTION mode IBM PC only).

The game is full of sumptuous graphics.

...GET EVEN!

CONQUEST OF JAPAN



Your Chance to get your own back! Conquest of Japan gives you five cities, each with money to hire armies -it is up to you to buy the right soldiers, and direct your armies to conquer Honshu, Japan's main island! In a truly epic production, you are both the general,planning campaigns, and the army commander, directing troops within each battle. All battles are played out in real time, with your soldiers moving into formation in fantastic, colourful animation! You can become as involved as you like -from watching progress, to instructing individual men if you wish to! You can even choose to play each battle in Hi Res (386/25 machines or better reccommended) or faster Low Res.

FEATURES:

- *Miniature-style war simulation*
- *Cities located differently each game*
- *Choice of authentic troop formations*
- *Simple to play*
- *Your chance to conquer Japan!!*

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Reader Service No. 107

Very Special

Although available for some time on the Amiga in Europe, **Special Forces** now makes its way onto the PC platform. This is a squad level game featuring a platoon of eight members, though missions feature a maximum of four. Four levels of difficulty are available, the choice of which determines weaponry available (eg conscripts get advanced equipment). Sixteen missions are available each with a clearly defined objective. These are set in four areas of the world: the Tropics, the Arctic, Temperate Climes, and the Desert. In the desert, an 'unnamed aggressor (clue: his initials are 'SH') has invaded a small country which has lots of oil and taken it over. The legitimate government has fled and is now asking for help. Enter, the Special Forces. ❑

***Special Forces**, published by Microprose, should be available for the PC now.*

War in the Skies

The brothers Murry appear to have an obsession with the ancient warlord Sun Tzu, for he pops up again, somewhat incongruously, in **The Ancient Art War in the Skies**, their sequel to **The Ancient Art of War** and **The Ancient Art of War at Sea**. The last two titles were published by Broderbund, but now the brothers have switched their allegiance to Microprose who, of course, know all about 'war in the skies'.

Despite the title, the game is not an out and out flight sim but a strategy game containing lots of fun elements. The flight sequences, particularly the dogfights, are handled in something of a jokey manner, with cute animated cartoon-style planes whizzing though the clouds. The game is certainly not short of missions, with some forty-odd populating the game. As if that isn't enough, there is also a mission bulider/editor.

***The Ancient Art of War in the Skies**, published by Microprose, should be available now*

Working Hulk

Electronic Arts have licensed the computer rights to **Space Hulk**, the best selling boardgame from Games Workshop. This is a tactical wargame which pits Terminator Marine Squads against Alien Genestealers. The battles all take place in a huge derelict Space Hulk. The Marines get kitted out with a variety of weapons; tactical dreadnought armor, stormbolters, power gloves, and heavy flamers. The aliens, for their part, have very large teeth. On the face, dentures versus high tech weaponry may seem a bit unbalanced but the aliens are clad in 'chitinous armor', whatever that is.

The space marines are selected for each mission according to their abilities. Strategies for the individual scenarios must be plotted in advance on a scrolling map. The squads then go off to play in real time combat. Players have visor views of their five marines and may switch control as is their wont. The eponymous hulk is a labyrinthine mass of tunnels and corridors. Marines can be placed to guard corridors or doorways or to track down the aliens.

Exploration of the corridors is said to require strategic thought and 'fast reflexes', two not entirely compatible abilities. Just how much the dreaded 'arcade action' will impinge on what could be an interesting strategy game we will find out shortly.

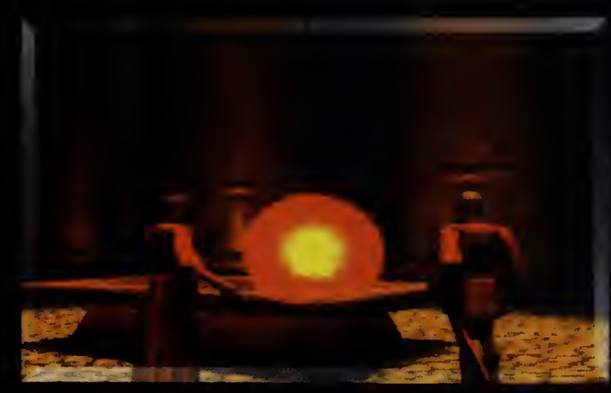
***Space Hulk** will be released by Electronic Arts for the PC and Amiga in January*

REAL SOON NOW

Brian Walker looks at the shape of games to come

Ultima® VII

PART TWO



SERPENT ISLE™

SERPENT ISLE FEATURES:

- An original story line continuing the *Ultima VII* adventure, but no previous *Ultima* experience is necessary. *Serpent Isle* is a stand alone game.
- An unexplored region of Britannia with new terrain features — you'll even trudge through ice and snow.
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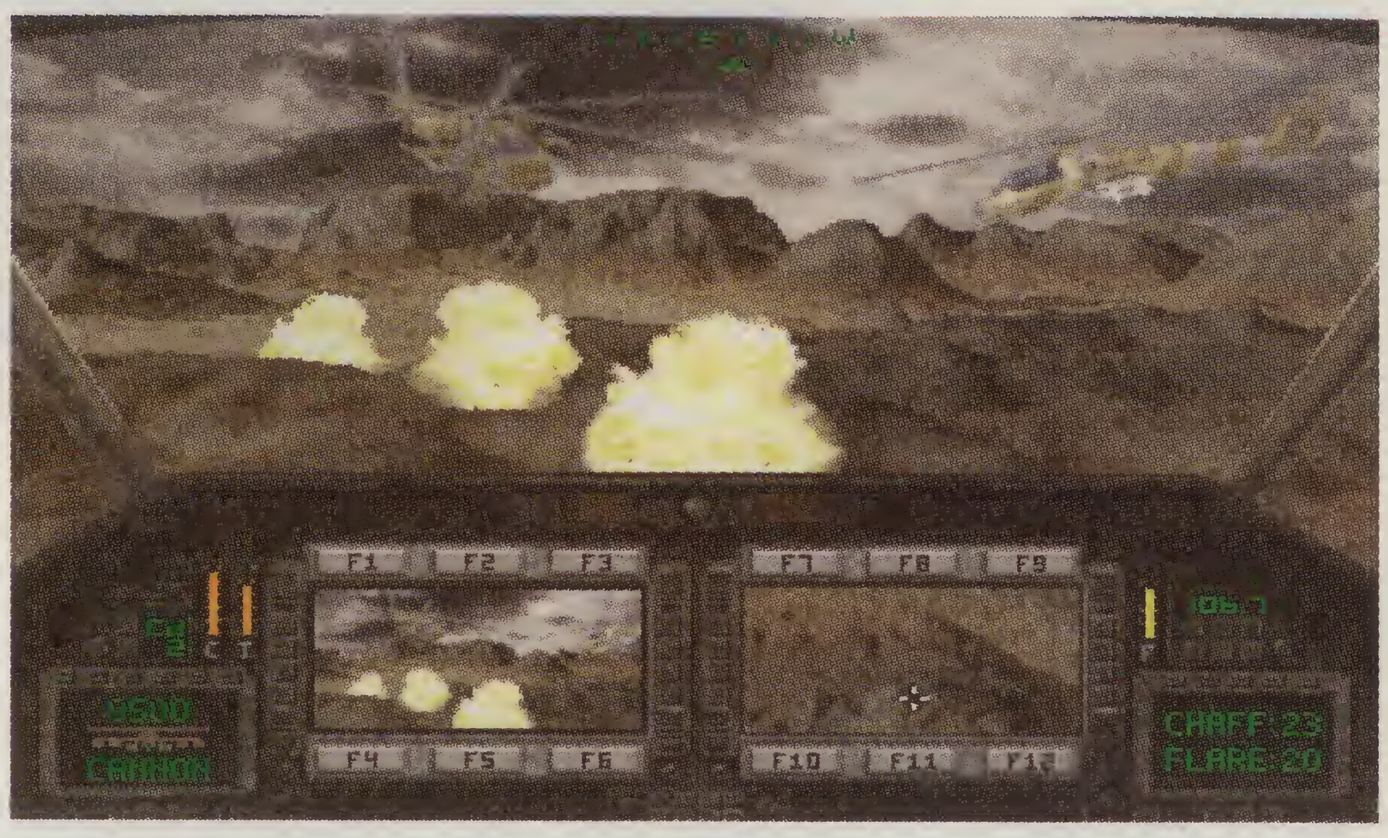
Reader Service No. 4

COMMANCHE MAXIMUM OVERKILL

by NovaLogic's David Holmes

Comanche Maximum Overkill is a glimpse into the future of military avionics and an exactingly accurate simulator of the Boeing-Sikorsky RAH-66 Comanche Attack Helicopter. What makes this simulation different is that Comanche delivers with true 3-D imagery. When piloting our simulator through a difficult mission, actual terrain in real-time 3-D graphics may be seen and maneuvered through. Gone are the coarse triangles of contemporary flight simulators and the harsh unreality of former graphics technology. The missions in the game will all be hypothetical and take place in the year 1999.



Poly gone

So what's the difference between this and existing flight simulators? Current flight simulators already boast the highest evolution of polygon technology - and they are right. Until now, the only 'correct' way to render a full 3-D image was with polygons. Unfortunately, they suffer from several drawbacks - the main problem being their speed. Since they are computationally intensive, only relatively few polygons can be computed every frame. For this reason, polygon games tend to look sparse and can only give a rough representation of terrain features.

To bypass these inherent drawbacks, programmers have resorted to utilizing the smallest unit of a polygon structure, a triangle, for 3-D surface emulation. It is this feature that gives most of the current 3-D games their characteristic 'computer look' that works against the suspension of disbelief that game designers strive towards. To alleviate the 'blockiness' problem, some of the newer products texture map pictures of real surfaces over the triangular polygon surfaces. This technique is similar to wallpapering over an irregular surface. Doing this improves the look of the game, but tends to slow the simulation down considerably.

Voxel pop

NovaLogic has leapfrogged polygon technology and perfected a new mathematical entity known as a voxel. With it, we have developed an entirely new and extensible graphics development system named Voxel Space.

Generating up to 1 million 3D calculations per second, this allows for over 500 times more true detail than polygon graphics and harnesses the *full* 32bit 386/486 Power of a CPU. Written in flat mode assembly language, this technique creates the most detailed real-time graphics in a point of view simulator.

How does Voxel Space work? If you think of a pixel as a 2-dimensional image unit, a single point on a plane - then imagine a voxel as a 3-dimensional image unit. Each voxel carries information on not just it's vertical and horizontal position but also it's relative distance from the viewer. With today's computer architectures, Nova Logic's proprietary method for manipulating voxels is approximately 500 faster than the fastest 3-D rendering programs. It is this method that NovaLogic is currently applying for a patent on and hoping to revolutionize the arena of point of view simulators.

The natural look

Another major advantage to this method is that it allows our simulations to use actual terrain data. Derived from sources as diverse as satellite radar mapping to US Geological Survey data, we can players move about ground they are familiar with in real time. 'We are not talking about a computerized slide show,' says John Garcia president of NovaLogic. 'This is a fully interactive system where users can explore the environment in whatever direction they would like. What other plans do they have in mind for Voxel Space technology? 'The possibilities are endless,' Garcia elaborates. 'With real terrain data we can explore natural features as they appeared when the data was gathered. It is an incredible feeling to be able to interactively explore a major land feature such as Mt St Helens before and after the eruption.

Nothing is more exciting than the evolution of new technology that changes and revolutionizes the industry it is developed within. Boeing-Sikorsky is pushing into new realms of man and machine interaction utilizing true state-of-the-art scientific advances to create an amazing machine for the 21st Century with the Comanche. We felt it was the perfect fusion of product and technology for NovaLogic to introduce its landmark development of the Voxel Space graphics technology into the world of personal computers. ❑

***Comanche Maximum Overkill** is scheduled for a November 1 release by NovaLogic in the US and by US Gold in the UK*

Note
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Reader Service No. 52

PACIFIC WAR

Brian Walker dons the fatigues

Hot on the heels of **Carrier Strike** comes Gary Grigsby's follow-up for SSI, **Pacific War** which, as the title suggests, covers the entire Pacific conflict. Ships, planes, and ground forces located in the Pacific theatre circa 1941 to 1945 are all included in the game. Players command operations from Burma to the West Coast of America, and from the Aleutians to Australia, a territory spanning 78 million square miles. As well as featuring two campaigns (1941 and 1942) the program includes, and five scenarios as follows:

- Rising Sun - December 7 1941 to March 31 1942.
- Coral Sea/ MIdway - May 2 1941 to June 30 1942
- Guadalcanal - August 7 1942 to end of war
- Marianas - June 12 1944 to end of war
- Leyte Gulf October 13 to end of war

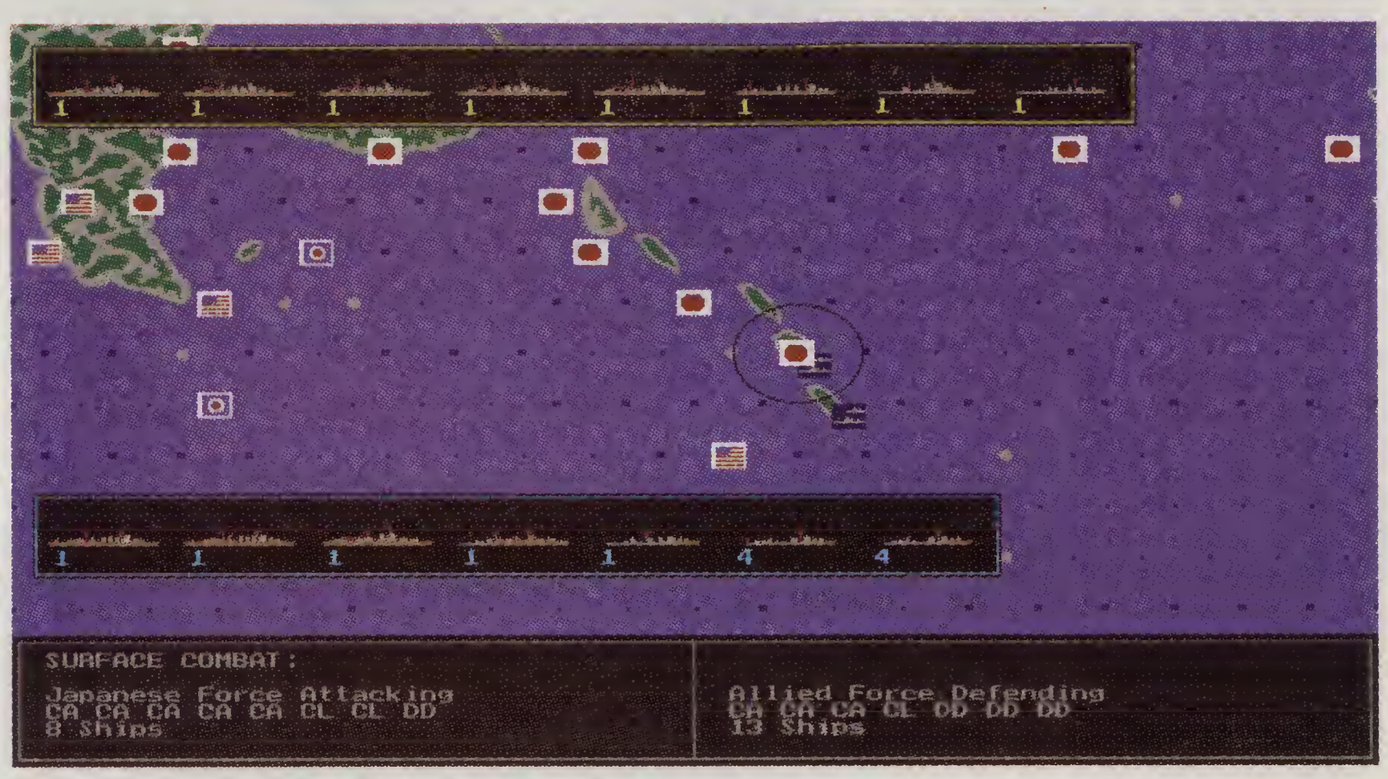
Perhaps heeding complaints, SSI have included a tutorial for the first time in this series as well as a section on strategy and tactics. From the look of the game the tutorial will certainly be needed as **Pacific War** is truly a monster in the grand tradition. The strategy section in the manual focuses on each individual scenario rather than taking the broad view. The map is pretty much the same as that seen in **Carrier Strike**, except that it's bigger. A single hex represents 100 miles and every turn equals one week.

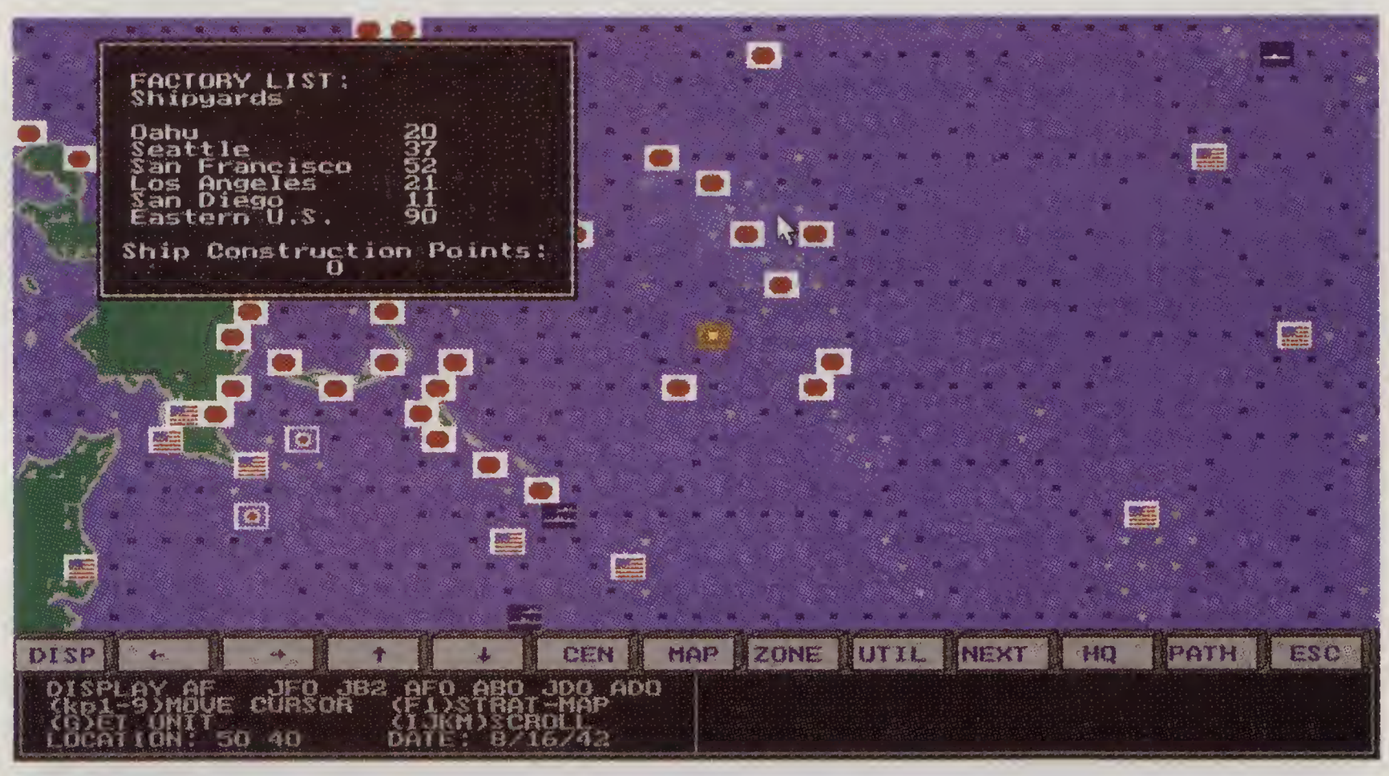
Each game in the series, which comprises **Second Front**, **Western Front**, and **Carrier Strike**, has shown a marginal improvement over the last and **Pacific War** maintains this sequence, especially in that treacherous region known as 'the interface'.

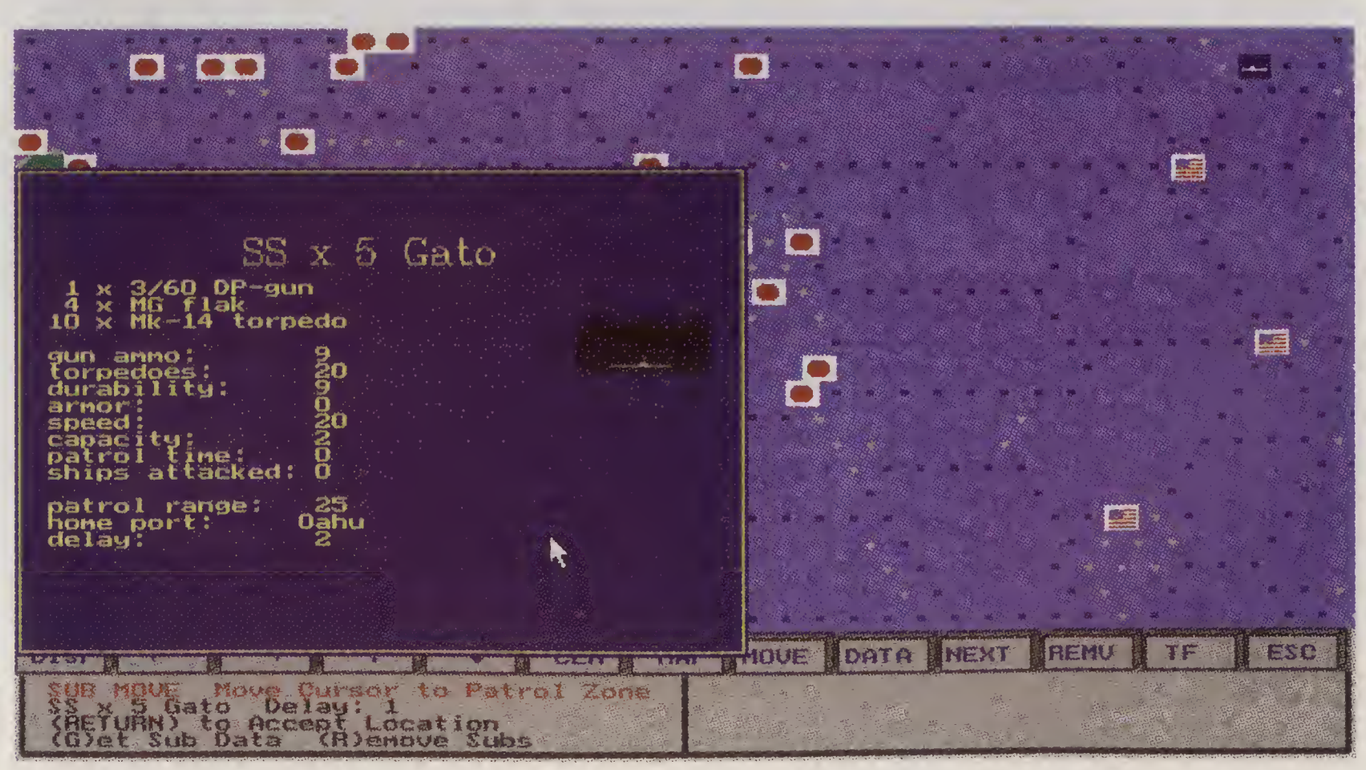
A detailed database of all divisional units, ships, and air squadrons is now provided, as are graphics displays of ships and planes. There are also more 'short cuts' to help locate 'missing' ships. 'Preparation points' replace the 'political points' that were a feature of **Western Front**. These may be used in a variety of ways; to activate land combat units, to select a new HQ or Air Leader, and so on. Leaders play an important role in the game in that they will greatly influence the fortunes and performance of the formations under their command. It is crucial, therefore, to avoid placing leaders in positions where their weaknesses will be highlighted.

Naval combat can be displayed with multiple levels of detail ranging from almost no information through to seeing every exploding bomb and torpedo. As well as playing on five different levels, the computer can be instructed to take over some of the more mundane tasks. ❑

Pacific War will be released for the PC by SSI in November and reviewed in out next issue







Air Bucks

Reach for the pie

By Mike Woodhouse

The airline business really started to develop in the 1950's, as wartime technological advances started to filter through to the marketplace. At the same time, consumer buying power started to grow to the point at which small, but nonetheless significant numbers of people could afford commercial air travel, particularly within North America. **Air Bucks** follows the development of the commercial airline business from this time to the present day.

Miami twice

Starting with enough capital to purchase a short-range aircraft and landing rights in Miami, the prospective entrepreneur must bid against competitors for the rights to other cities. Once acquired, revenue-generating routes can be established which hopefully will generate sufficient revenue to cover operating costs and generate healthy profits, thus allowing further expansion. As time goes on a network of routes develops. New aircraft allow greater distances to be covered between cities and at greater speed. Naturally, this allows higher fares to be charged since customers will pay premium rates for premium service.

There are up to four competing airlines but only two companies may acquire landing rights at any one city. Owners may find themselves cutting fares to the bone (and beyond) in order to win the lion's share of the passengers and cargo available on a given route. As time passes, financial difficulties may necessitate borrowing from the bank or even the selling of shares in the company.

The bank will expect a certain minimum maintenance, and may threaten to remove the player if their criteria are not met. All this sounds like a recipe for a rich, varied and absorbing series of all night gaming sessions. Well, it did to me. The benchmark for a game of this type must be **Railroad Tycoon**, which despite its profoundly irritating bugs, remains my all-time favourite game. **Air Bucks** promised to be the global airgoing equivalent.

Type blast

As regular readers may have noticed by now, I have a particular interest in user interfaces. I expect a program to make the user's interaction with it a painless and non-intrusive experience. Drop-down menus, hot-key shortcuts for frequently used functions and a reasonable degree of lip-service being paid to *de facto* PC standards, are all to be expected in a strategy game. The **Air Bucks** user interface, whilst appearing initially to conform to these basic tenets, soon reveals itself to be a poor specimen. One wonders, for example, why the programmers completely ignored the existence of the Escape key in favour of the space bar when exiting menus. And furthermore, since the keyboard may be used to increment or decrement a fare when editing a route (which may have as many as eighteen individual numbers to be altered), was there not an option to simply type in the required number?

Loan lark

Graphically the game appears appealing, at least at the outset. A world map shows cities serviced and the routes that exist between them. A zoom mode allows the player to view aircraft taking off and landing in a smaller area. Since no actions can be taken when in this mode, it is completely useless, leaving only the completely static world map to entertain the player while the game chugs along....And that's the worst thing. The game really does play itself. After two false starts, I was able to amble into an apparently unassailable lead whilst spending the best of five hours that this entailed watching TV!

Intermittently the bank expressed its displeasure that my company had perhaps a smaller fleet or less routes than my computer controlled competitors. Since I not only had no outstanding loan but in fact had about 40 million dollars deposited with said bank, I took these warnings with a large pinch of salt.

Impressions have a history of reasonable ideas inadequately designed and poorly implemented. I have long felt that the latter, in particular, was due to a failure to play-test widely enough, combined with an excessive amount of pressure to get the product on the shelves. **Air Bucks** has a *genuinely* good game idea behind it. Sadly, the implementation is still lacking.

Impressions have said that a number of enhancements will be made for the US version. If that is so, there is no reason for anyone to consider a purchase until that happens. Any changes will have to be substantial. As it stands, **Air Bucks** is only of value as an object lesson in how not to develop what really is a fine basic concept. ❑

Designed by
Eddie Grabowski

Published by
Impressions

Systems
PC Amiga

PC Graphics
Low Res EGA

Supports
Mouse, keyboard

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A LOST PARADISE.
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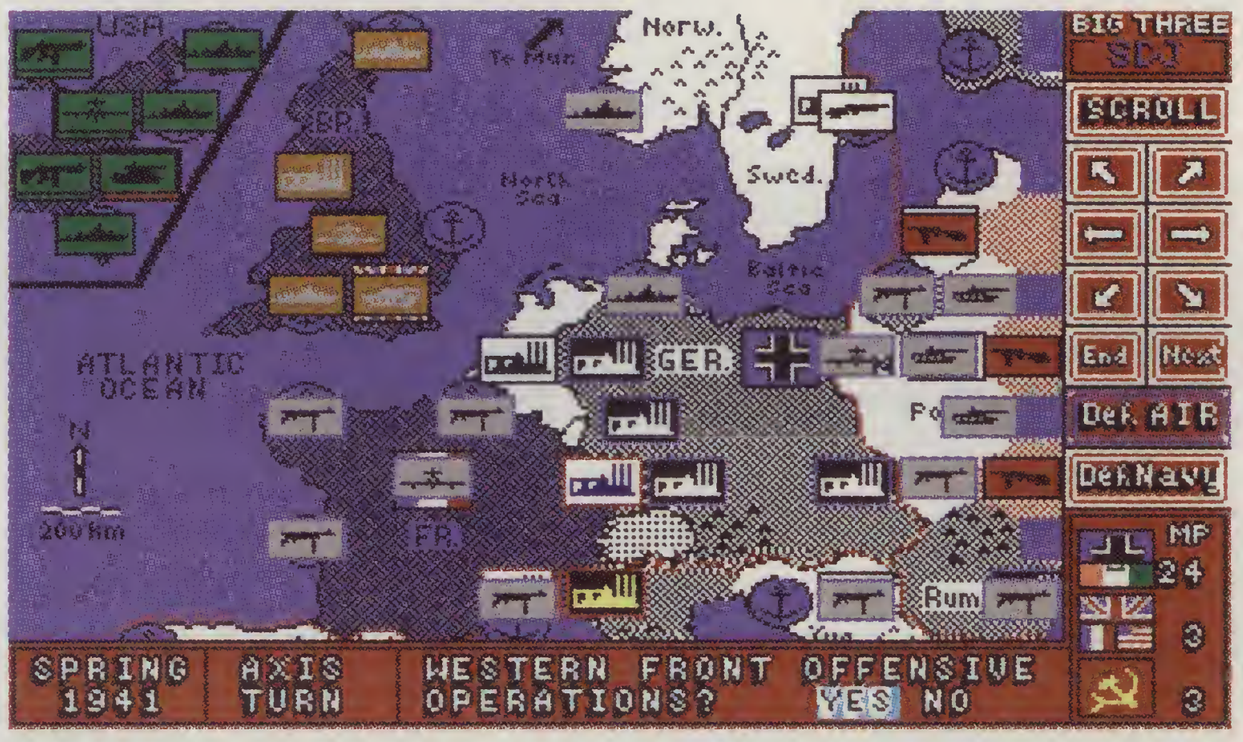
Reader Service No. 81

La Grande Armee & Big Three

Home alone

By Stuart Mitchell



Designed by
SDJ Enterprises

Published by
SDJ Enterprises

Graphics
Le Grande Armee -CGA
Big Three - CGA EGA

Systems
IBM PC

Supports
Mouse and keyboard

Players
2 player only

Back in olden times we didn't have computers. Instead we played games with cardboard counters on paper maps. Hard to believe. The games were fun, but finding an opponent could be a problem. Not to mention having to leave the games setup for the pets (pests?) to ravage. So when computers and computer games became common many of us moved from paper to silicon for our gaming. Silicon gaming gave us an instant opponent, though not always a good one.

SDJ Enterprises are a small company and very much a hobby enterprise. But they remember those days and the kind of games that were popular then. So they created two board games on the computer. Just as in the old days, the games are intended for two human players in a face-to-face match of wits and strategic insight. The hexagonal maps and simple pieces have been re-created as well. All that's missing is the paper and the dice.

La Grand Armee

This is the first creation from SDJ. It covers the Napoleonic Wars from Spain to Russia and Denmark to Italy. The game is played on the grand strategic level and is quite reminiscent of Avalon Hill's venerable **War and Peace**. Players move units representing infantry, cavalry, and artillery corps along with headquarters units. As the game progresses new units can be built and old ones deleted, allowing players to reap the benefits of their conquests. Or suffer the worries of defeat.

Le Grande Armee includes over a half-dozen scenarios covering various theatres of the war from the Austerlitz campaign to the Waterloo campaign. There is no Campaign scenario covering the length of the wars. Play is simple and consists of creating/rallying units, then movement. If a unit moves into an enemy square, combat is conducted. During combat, the defending player may reinforce the hex or withdraw. This style of play is appropriate for the scale depicted, but precludes play-by-mail gaming since both players must be present at all times during the game.

When I first sat down to a game of **Le Grand Armee**, I couldn't imagine how a game at this scale could possibly capture the feel of Napoleonic conflict. And in a way I was right. There are no thundering cavalry charges, no bombardments from artillery batteries, no infantry in squares holding out against the cavalry. But at the scale it plays at, **Le Grand Armee** works fine.

Big Three

Big Three does for World War II in Europe what **Le Grand Armee** did for the Napoleonic Wars. In scale, the closest board game analog would probably be Avalon Hill's **Hitler's War**.

As in **Le Grand Armee**, players build units during the game. The quantity of builds depends on the number of cities under a player's control. And, as in **Le Grand Armee**, play is straightforward with the twist that the opposing player may intervene during the current player's turn. In this case, the intervention is in the form of air and naval intercepts.

Combat and maneuver are rather limited at this scale. In most cases, players can do little more than launch straightforward attacks against the opposing forces to try and force a breakthrough.

Supply plays an important role and players will wish to maneuver when possible to isolate pockets of enemy troops. There is always at least one phase of attacking available before out of supply units are destroyed, so breakouts are possible.

Neither **Le Grand Armee** nor Big Three can boast of state of the art graphics. **Le Grand Armee** is only available in CGA, while **Big Three** supports 16-color EGA. The graphics are clear and functional, though, and don't impede play. **Le Grand Armee** even includes a short summary of the Napoleonic Wars. Both games are fun and very reminiscent of old beer-and-pretzels games from my youth (when it was usually soda-and-chips). I wished for a true computer opponent, but found I settled into the old solitaire routine quite nicely. And for those with an opponent handy, these may prove a diverting compromise between unwieldy paper games and idiosyncratic computer opponents. ❑

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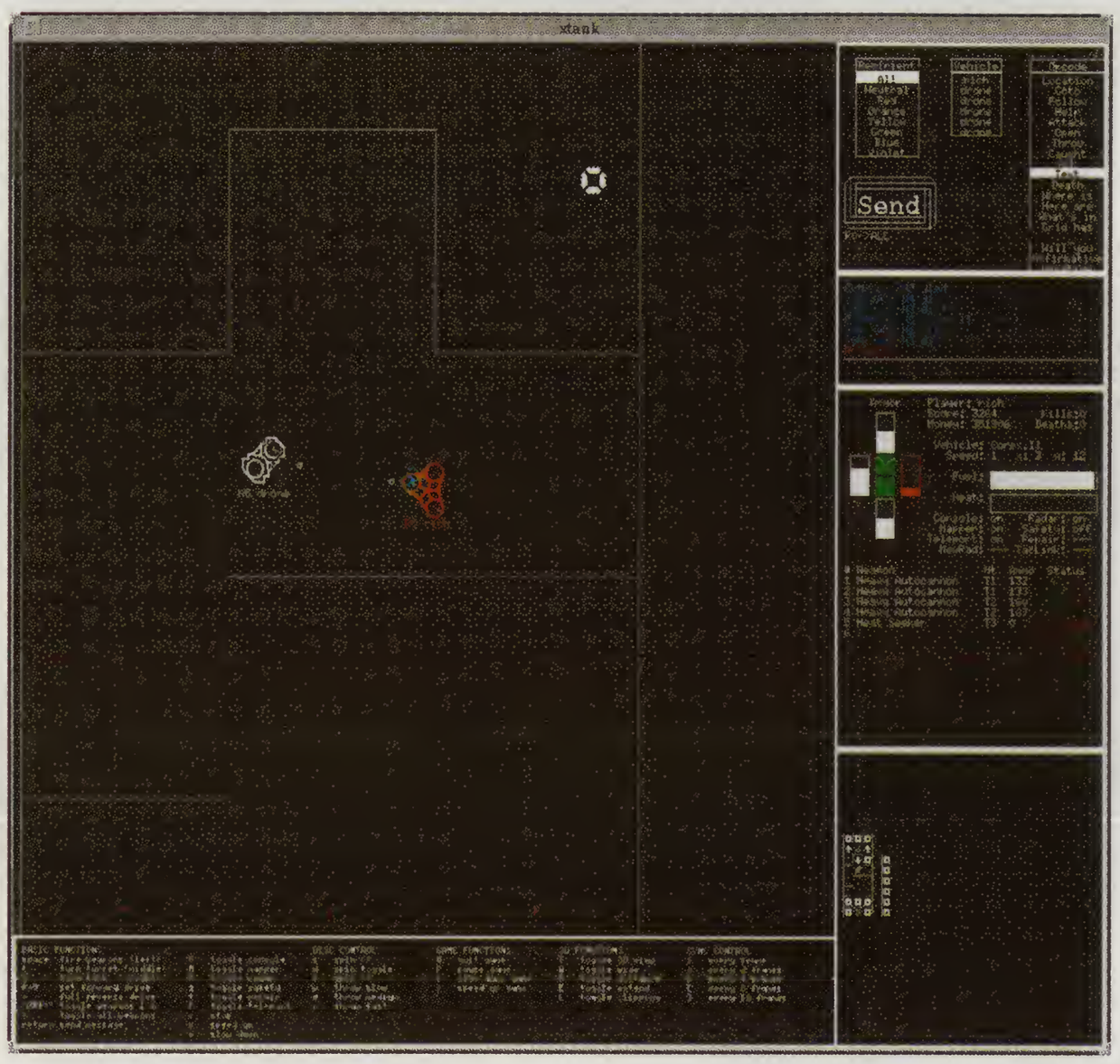
Reader Service No. 5

Xtank

All at C

By Richard Lawrence



Designed by
Terry Donahue, Gordon H Smith, Josh M Osborne, and Kurt Lidl,

Available free on
UseNet

Notes
Provided as 1.5MB of compressed source code, 8MB of disk space required for compile, 2MB for game itself. Requires the X-Windows system from MIT, version 11, release 3 or later, at least 8MB of ram, works with almost any UNIX based system. Display is 1024x768, color recommended. Tested hardware was Sun 4/75GX with 32MB of RAM and 848MB disk, along with NCD 19c X-terminal. Soundblaster support is available for PC's running UNIX, and is being added for Sun systems.

The concept that is central to **Xtank** is an old one as computer games go: the user creates a vehicle (tank is just a convenient label, as the vehicles can really be anything) based on a set of configuration rules, and then writes a program for that vehicle to allow it to attack others. The only conceptual difference between **Xtank** and games that go back as far as the early 80's on an Apple II is the ability of the player to directly control his tank, either against other players or against programs.

Program notes

There's a world of difference, however, in the implementation. Many games similar to **Xtank** (for instance, **Omega** from Origin Systems) have a special programming language for the tanks that keeps tank programs from getting too complex or long. **Xtank**, on the other hand, uses standard C programs for the tanks, which are compiled and linked into the **Xtank** program itself. This takes advantage of the source code distribution method popular for UNIX programs, with the assumption being that if you are capable of writing a C program for a tank you should be capable of compiling and linking it into the product.

The use of standard C for the **Xtank** programs introduces a large flexibility into the tank programs themselves. If a player were persistent and patient enough, tank programs could be written that kept database entries for enemies and their behavior pattern, or with huge AI sections. The general challenge, however, is to write the most amount of functionality into the least amount of code possible, following the ancient hacker tradition of reverence for elegant programs. Tank programs supplied in the distribution vary from 20 lines to 5600.

Fans on feet

Also in the old UNIX tradition is the wry wit spread throughout the source code and the tank programs; one option in the main program is to turn on color commentary which begins with 'The fans are on their many little feets...' This section of the code is called cosell. One of the tanks provided does nothing but taunt players with Eliza-like messages ('Tell me about yourself'' or 'Why are you so aggressive?'). Eliza, for the uninitiated, is an old program written to imitate a human psychiatrist.

Because programming tanks can be imposing to those unfamiliar with C, there are a large number of tank programs pre-supplied with the distribution, and there is an entire group of people known simply as 'players' who never program tanks on their own, but use other peoples programs or self-pilot their tanks. Generally anyone who has written a functional and competitive **Xtank** program calls themselves an '**Xtank** programmer' as a matter of pride (not to be confused with The Programmers - those who wrote the **Xtank** program itself).

Vehicle design is much more intuitive, but not any less sophisticated, than tank programming. The interface is mostly point and click with a few typed responses, but although it's easy to design a tank, careful consideration must be put into the right combination of features, or the tank will be a failure.

Amazing trace

Design is a compromise between body size (and subsequently space available), weight versus engine performance, heat generated by weapons, and other factors. Tanks come in many different styles - there are 12 basic body types - and players may find unlikely combinations on the battlefield, like electrical motorcycles against huge fusion powered behemoths.

A properly administered **Xtank** system keeps such unlikely matchups to a minimum, however, since there is

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"Makes the term 'virtual' redundant!"
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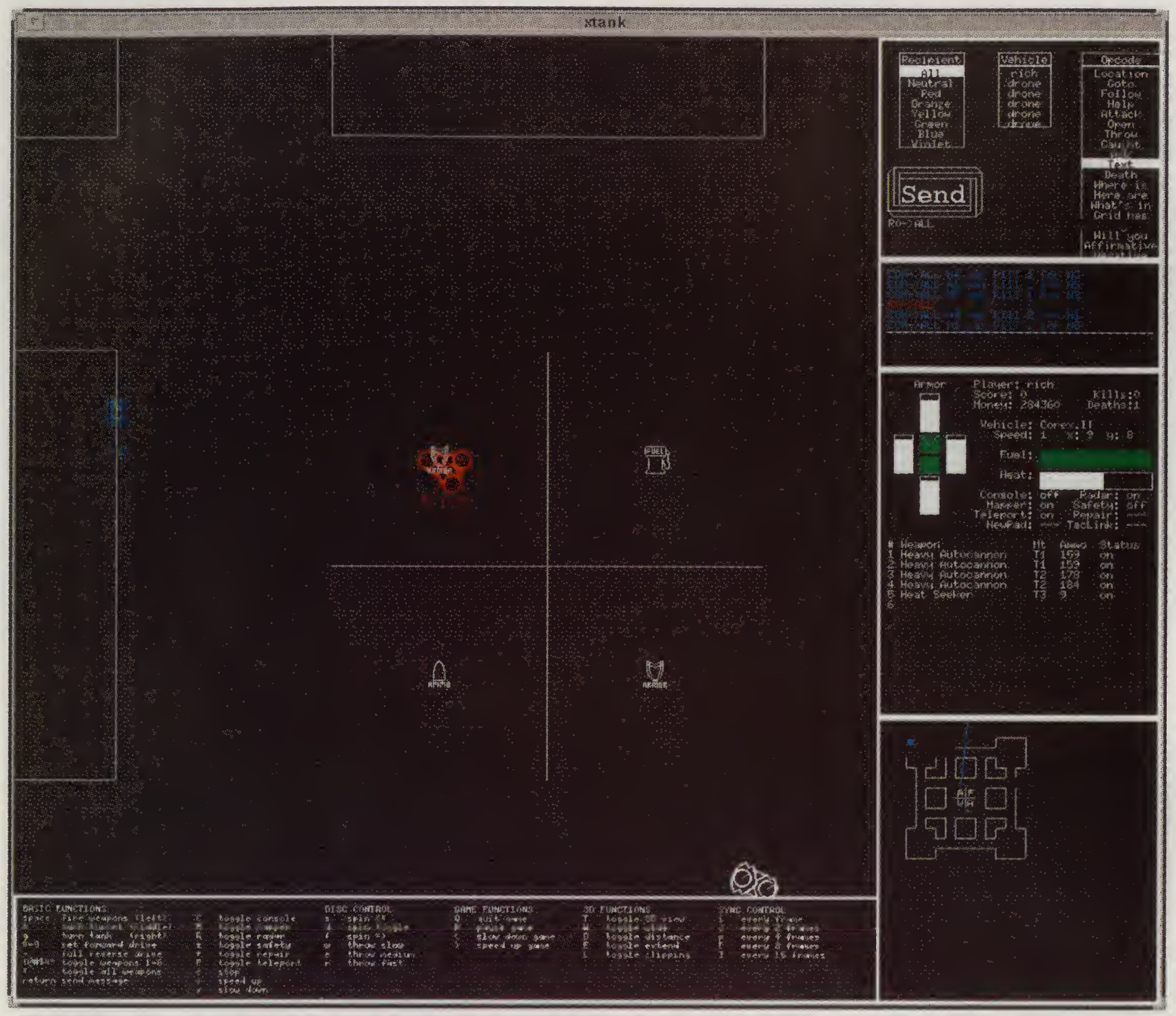
Reader Service No. 78



'money' in the game and a large vehicle will cost considerably more. Depending on the mission objectives, a larger tank may actually win the battle but loose the war because of too much money spent.

The battlefield is generally referred to as a maze, and again this is completely configurable from within the program. A good maze design is as appreciated by the players as a good tank design. Mazes are made of several objects. There are standard walls, and walls that can be destroyed when damaged.

There are Outposts, which will fire on any enemy vehicle (teams are distinguished by color). Scroll squares will move a tank in the indicated direction - the only problem being that one can only see that direction when looking at the design of the map, not driving through it. The same applies to slide and slow squares, which are equivalent to ice and mud in effects on the tanks. Running into these squares, since they are invisible, can be quite frustrating to the neophyte player, unless the tank happens to be a hovercraft (which is unaffected by terrain).

Frisbee disc

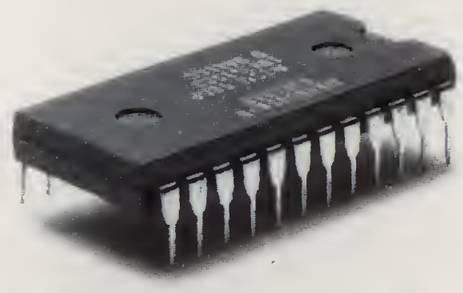
The game itself can be played in several different ways, with different rules applying depending on the method chosen. Combat, the most basic scheme, is easy to understand - kill your opponents. War is a variation of combat, and has a goal of controlling a certain percentage of territory by being the last tank to move into it. Ultimate is literally a game of Frisbee ultimate played with tanks. The object is to move the disc into the opponents goal (without being killed). The disk is controllable in several ways separate from the tank, and can be 'thrown' from tank to tank. Ultimate is very popular among networked players, and leads to fiercely competitive games. Capture starts with two discs, one in each teams goal. The objective is to end up with both discs in a friendly goal. Finally, Race has the simple objective of being the first tank to reach the goal. All games allow up to nine players through the network, either on teams or individually.

In any of these games the player can elect to either have a program run the tank, or to pilot the tank manually. Manual control is complex and can be difficult even for experienced players, since in normal operation it requires six buttons (three on the mouse, three on the keyboard) plus the directional control of the mouse cursor. With the mouse button one fires, two turns turrets in the direction pointed to by the cursor, and with three turns the tank towards the cursor. The turrets will automatically turn when firing, but this can take too long in critical situations, so mastery of the middle button is required. On the keyboard, v accelerates, c comes to a stop, and x is reverse. Add to these keys the complexities of disc control in Ultimate (up to four more keys to worry about) and it can be seen why some players prefer to play completely through programs.

Cerebral arcade

The display during the game itself is easy to understand yet conveys a fair amount of information. The primary window shows the player (always central in the display) with any surrounding objects or enemies. Directly below is a brief summary of available commands, and to the lower right is a radar map of the immediate territory (if the vehicle is so equipped). To the right is a status indicator, showing armor levels, ammo left, and current speed/heat status of the vehicle. Top right shows the teams playing, and any commentary made by either the computer or other players. Players can send messages to each other throughout the game, either directly person to person, to their team, or to everyone.

Xtank takes a simple concept and extends it into a complex and highly sophisticated game. Players can choose the cerebral challenge of programming a tank capable of beating human opponents, or they can go for the arcade action of taking control themselves and blowing away their friends. The game is continually being updated with new features, and has its own discussion areas on UseNet which is indicative of its wide popularity in the UNIX community. PC game manufacturers could learn a thing or two from a product with such depth and game play, especially in the pricing department. How many average games have been released for the PC this year in the $40-$70 price range, with minimal returns in play time? **Xtank** is free, and many players get hours of play out of it every week for years. ❑



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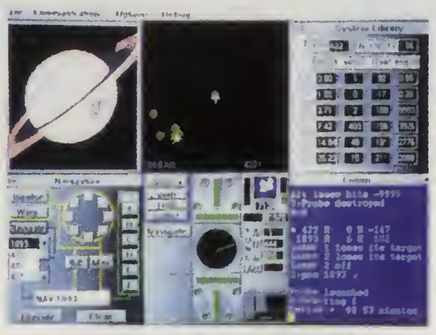

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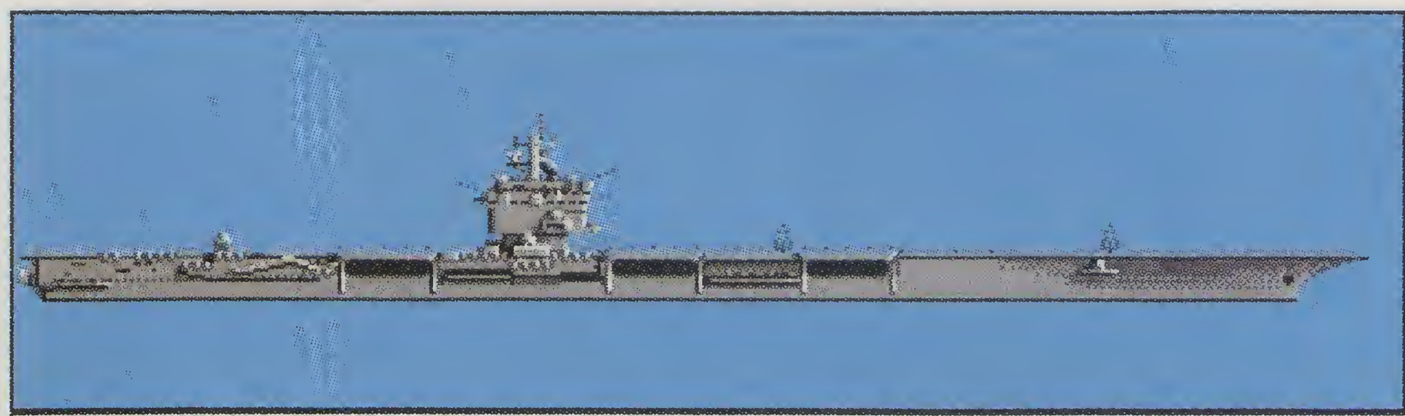

Class: CVN Enterprise
Length: 335 meters
Displacement: 75700 tons
Damage Points: 1378
Maximum Speed: 35

This ship can claim several firsts: first nuclear powered surface warship, first nuclear powered carrier, largest ship in the world (when built, it has now been outweighed, but it is still longer than Nimitz/Roosevelt class). Like the Long Beach, this ship has gone through some changes in its 30 year career. Orginally it carried a "billboard" planar array air search radar; that was replaced in a refit with SPS 48 and SPS 49. It has several big advantages over oil burner carriers; space normally used for fuel oil can carry more avgas and bombs, the pilots don't have to fly through stack gases to land their aircraft, and nuclear power means it can steam at flank speed indefinitely without having to refuel. This last item is somewhat watered down these days as there aren't enough CGNs to escort every CVN. Not much advantage going places if you left your escorts behind because they had to refuel.

[E]xit [S]ensors [W]eapons [N]ext [P]revious

All Engines Ahead Full...

Three-Sixty Pacific's Carl Norman sets the course for Harpoon's future

Present Course and Speed

Since its' 1989 debut in computer form, the modern naval warfare simulation **Harpoon** has continued to grow in popularity and scope. Three-Sixty Pacific's **Harpoon** is based upon the paper and miniatures wargame design by Larry Bond, a best-selling author and naval analyst. There have been several follow-on products in the form of BattleSets containing additional scenarios from various regions of the world, and a Scenario Editor that enables users to design and create their own scenarios.

New scenarios are now available with the release of the **Harpoon Designers' Series** (HDS) which creates enhanced versions of the original four **Harpoon** BattleSets. A major upgrade for both the PC and Macintosh versions of **Harpoon** has also been completed that includes a new and more realistic modeling of sonar and weapons systems. The upgrades are include with the purchase of the **Harpoon Designers' Series** or may be ordered directly from Three-Sixty Pacific.

Efforts are now underway to create **Harpoon II**, an all-new simulation that will take advantage of the increased memory and capabilities of today's computers to produce even greater realism. The **Harpoon** development Team at Three-Sixty Pacific is currently engaged in the design phase of the project. Many of the features being considered in the design of **Harpoon II** have come from the suggestions and comments of **Harpoon** users.

Definition of a Harpooner

With all this **Harpoon** activity afoot it is important to recognize that unique individual; the **Harpoon** user, or Harpooner as they are often called. What type of person plays this simulation? The majority are males who vary in age from about 14 to 60 and come from a wide background of occupations and professions. Many are students, members of the armed forces, doctors, lawyers, educators, and even a few computer programmers. They hail from the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, Sweden, Netherlands, Israel, Spain, New Zealand, France, Hong Kong, South Africa, and just recently, Russia. Most Harpooners are very serious and studious about the accuracy and complexity of modern naval warfare and insist that **Harpoon** be precise and realistic. Harpooning can be a serious way of life for some folks.

Many Harpooners are inflicted with what is know as Harpoon Compulsion Disorder or HCD for short. The symptoms are obvious:

- Long hours in front of a Computer Harpoon screen
- A total disregard for the save game feature
- Upgrading a computer system just to play Harpoon
- Constantly mumbling 'Just one more airstrike and I'll turn it off...'
- Consider the destruction of a platform to enemy action as a personal loss
- Referring to aircraft, ships, and submarines as "platforms" and constantly talking with the use of acronyms (i.e. OTH, TASM, TLAM, AAW, ASW, ASuW, and AEW)
- A sudden interest in TV programs such as *Wings*, *Firepower*, and *Carriers*

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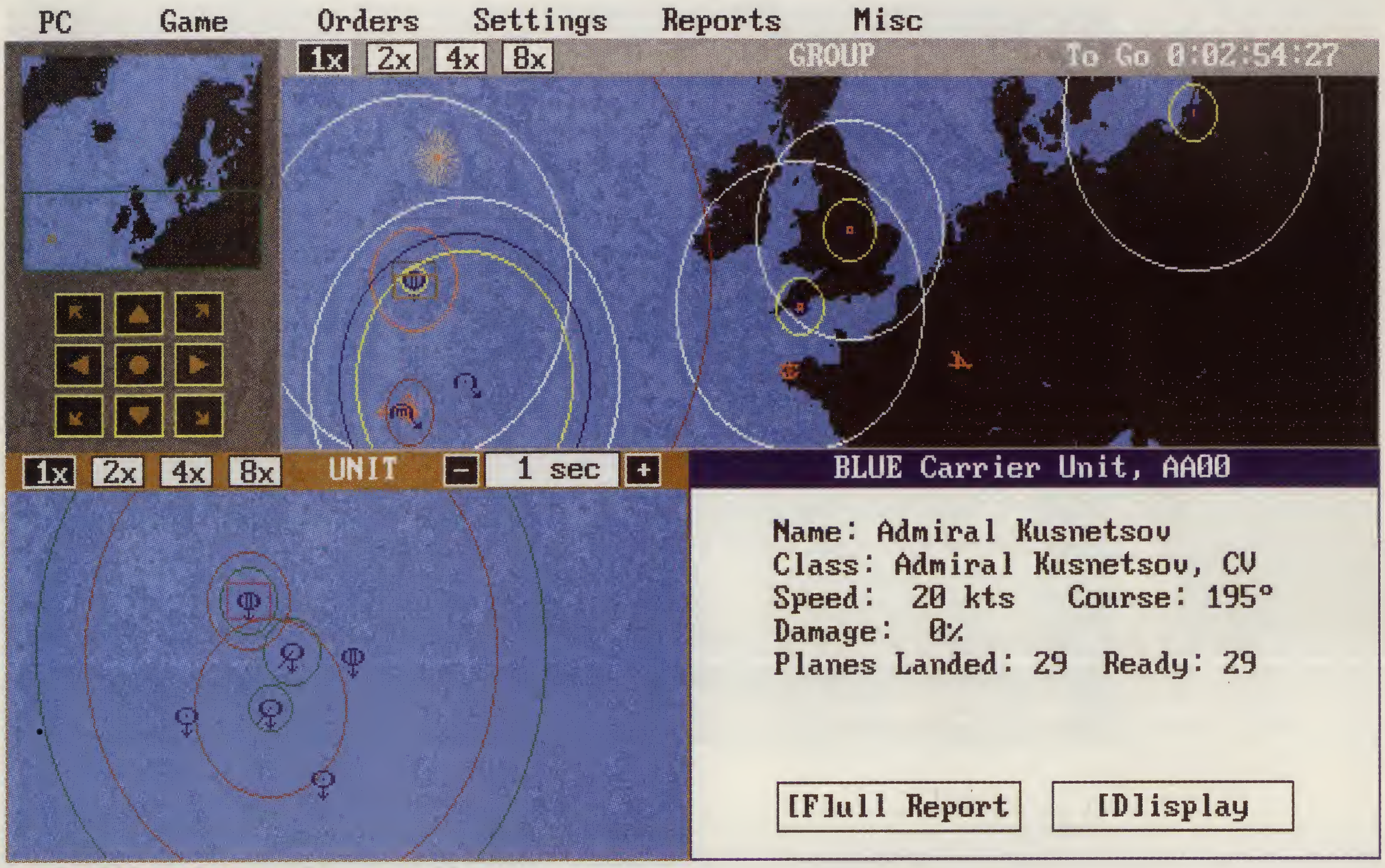


This condition was first diagnosed by the wife of one Harpooner who determined that HCD can only be treated with more scenarios, a faster computer, and a subscription to the U.S. Naval Institute's journal Proceedings. A support group for Harpoon widows is being considered.

Get a HUG

There is an established Harpoon Users' Group with hundreds of members that publishes a quarterly newsletter and operates a Bulletin Board System that allows Harpooners to upload their scenarios created with the Scenario Editor. Members may download these user-created scenarios from the BBS library. Discussion on strategy, tactics, scenario design, weapons systems, and world events takes place on the BBS message area. The Harpoon Scenario Warehouse BBS is located in the New York City area and can be accessed by calling 516-829-2557 via modem. The BBS supports up to a 14,400 Baud rate. Information about the Harpoon Users' Group can be obtained by sending a self-addressed, stamped envelope to:

Harpoon Users' Group
P.O. Box 5138
Bryan, TX 77805-5138

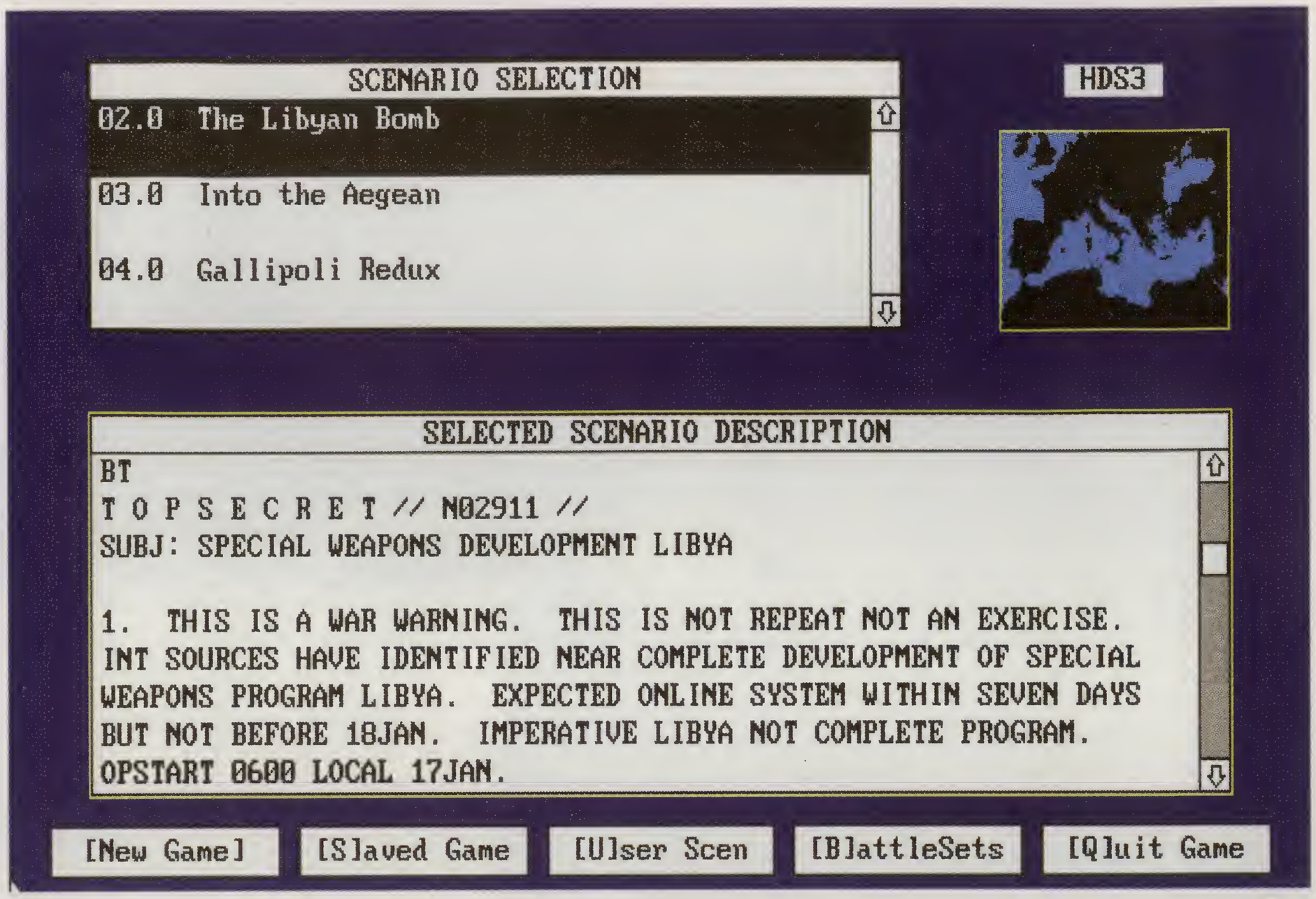
Harpooners can also be found on all of the major information services (CompuServe, GEnie, Prodigy, America On-line, and Internet. The file libraries of these information services also contain user-created scenarios while Harpoon topics continue to be discussed daily on the message boards.

Designer battles

The new **Harpoon Designers' Series** provides the Harpooner with up to 48 new scenarios with additional platforms and countries represented. The installation routine for **HDS** creates an enhanced version for each of the previous BattleSets the user currently owns. Each of these enhanced **HDS** BattleSets contains 12 scenarios that were written by selected scenario designers that were recruited from the ranks of Harpooners for their scenario design expertise.

The **HDS** scenarios take current events into consideration and reflect changes to the world including the fall of the Soviet Union and the current crisis in the former Yugoslavia. Many of the new scenarios have countries represented that were not present in the original BattleSets such as Sweden, Bulgaria, Canada, and Germany. A Scenario Manual is included that contains background and designers' notes for each of the 48 new scenarios. Scenario orders are present in message text Format similar to what actual military units use to pass information and orders.

The **HDS** BattleSets provide the scenario designer with a larger selection of platforms to include in their designs. Hundreds of additional ships, aircraft, and submarines are included in the BattleSet resource files. The scenario



designer is no longer restricted as to which platforms can be included on either the Red or Blue side. Now, task forces can be created with any combination of platforms imaginable. This new capability enables the scenario designer to create 'what if' scenarios.

Imagine creating scenarios that speculate joint operations between the Commonwealth of Independent States and the forces of NATO against a common threat. Scenarios can now explore the potential strife amongst the former Soviet Republics.

Old Code New Tricks

The latest upgrade to **Harpoon** for the PC is version 1.3. This has a new sonar model that more realistically represents the capabilities and limitations of modern sonar. Missiles and torpedoes are now modeled more accurately with each weapon having its own terminal guidance system represented. Players are now forced to pick the correct ordnance for each target. Defense of bases and ship groups by Surface-to-Air Missiles now requires that the defending units illuminate the incoming threat with radar, otherwise the defensive systems can not engage targets. Ship formations now have greater significance in a groups survival.

If attacked by enemy fighters, strike aircraft inbound to a target without proper fighter cover will now jettison ordnance and return to base. The aircraft endurance model has also been improved to more accurately represent the effects of altitude, payload, and speed on fuel consumption.

User-created scenarios can now be loaded directly from the BattleSet selection screen, eliminating the previous requirement of having to start a BattleSet scenario in order to load a user-created scenario. Text files containing scenario orders may now be read directly from within **Harpoon** .

The Macintosh upgrade, version 1.2, has the new sonar model and improved weapons modeling. The new Mac color upgrade for version 1.2 now works on the 12 inch Macintosh LC monitor, unlike the previous color version.

A Course for New Waters

One of the primary considerations for **Harpoon II** is more realism with additional features. There has been a great amount of demand for additional features to **Harpoon** from the users. Here are some of the features and that are being considered for Harpoon II:

- New and Improved Interface
- 256 Color Graphics
- Improved Artificial Intelligence Opponent
- Modem Play Capability
- Aerial Re-fueling Capability
- Logistics Modeling
- Neutral and Unknown Contacts
- Mining and Counter-mining operations
- Realistic Strike Planning

These are just some of the many considerations that the **Harpoon** development team are studying. It is important to point out that it is early in the development cycle and the final list of features has yet to be determined. The input from **Harpoon** users has been very helpful and one of the challenges being faced is deciding which features to include in the final design. Harpoon II has an expected release date sometime in late 1993. ❑

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Capture the Flag

Hitting them on the break

By John Harrington

Designed by
Richard Carr

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We used to call it 'Run Outs' when I was a kid; that game where two teams of scruffy urchins maraud around fields and woodlands in search of each other's home base. A harmless enough pastime but not one I thought would be worth basing a computer game on. This game convinced me otherwise.

To the woods

As the title suggests, the idea is to capture the flag of the other player (computer or human). To do this each player deploys a small team of characters, each of whom is evaluated for his or her Agility, Movement, Stealth and Vision, over a large playing field. The 'battleground' consists of several excellently rendered terrain types ranging from woodlands to flat grass, and these affect both line of sight and movement. In other words this is a typical tactical level wargame.

What's atypical about it is its potential appeal to non-wargamers. Not only is the subject matter essentially non-violent, but also the interface is incredibly easy to use and there is no rule book - all pertinent information is provided on a tutorial and pop-up help menus.

The screen display is divided into two windows, one for the map and one for the character control and status panels. The map window can be scrolled in any direction simply by moving the mouse to the screen edge. Alternatively a zoom-in option, a la **Silent Service**, is available for more rapid navigation and is effected by placing a cursor on the global overview map and clicking. The global map also has several other uses. For instance, whilst those parts of the playing field not yet discovered are automatically blacked out (as one would expect), it is also possible to black out those parts of the field not currently visible to team members even if they have been previous explored. This is an invaluable aid in plotting movement (do aircraft carrier simulations have this feature, I wonder?), as are the small question marks which feature on the map in the last known location of an enemy unit.

Icon seek

Inputting orders is ridiculously easy. First, move the cursor to the sidebar and click on a character icon. The main map will immediately zoom to that character's current location whilst the sidebar will display the character's remaining movement points and other skill ratings. Secondly, move the cursor to that character's desired destination and click. The computer automatically works out the quickest route, although sometimes it is preferable to choose an alternative route to avoid being seen.

Usually each team will be divided into defenders and attackers. The attackers explore enemy territory while the defenders protect the flag which, once situated, cannot be moved. Although all the character skills are useful for both attacking and defending my attackers tend to have high movement factors (for exploring lots of territory and running away from pursuers) and reasonable stealth (to assist in sneaking past look-outs). Defenders need high agility ratings to capture opponents and good vision to spot enemies approaching.

Captured characters have to return to their own territory and this may take several turns if they are caught deep in the opposition half. Although combined attacks are not possible, a succession of individual attacks will reduce the target's movement factor on his or her next turn, thereby limiting their ability to escape. The earlier in the movement phase characters attempts a capture, the more likely they are to be successful, so it is important to limit the prey's ability to run away.

My only criticisms stem from the inflexibility of the set-up options at the game start. There is no opportunity to alter the computer's choice of flag loca-

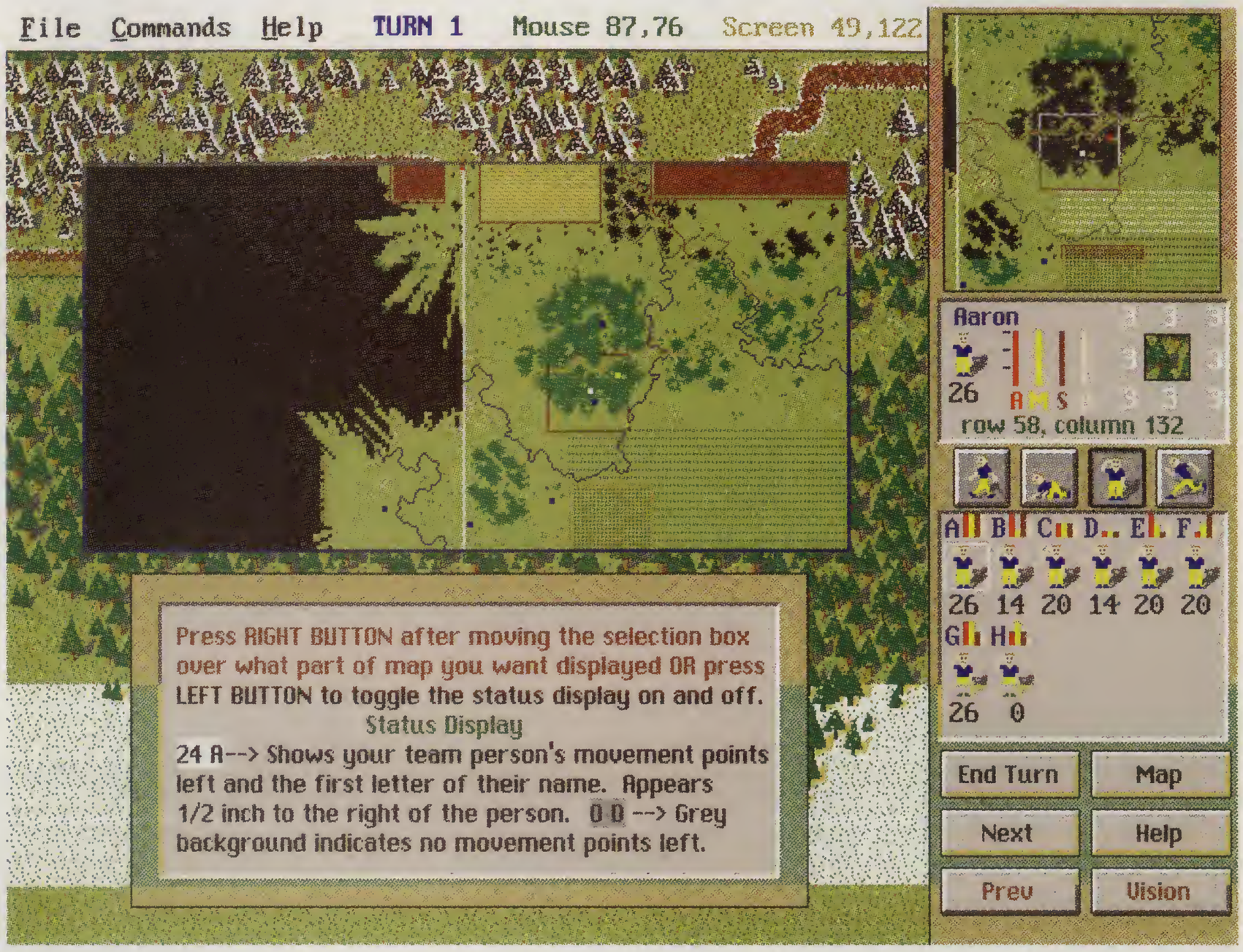
tion and neither is it possible to alter the skill profiles of the team members. However, I was only playing the shareware version of the game and it is possible that the full version of the software will address these problems, as it offers several other advanced features such as a map builder.

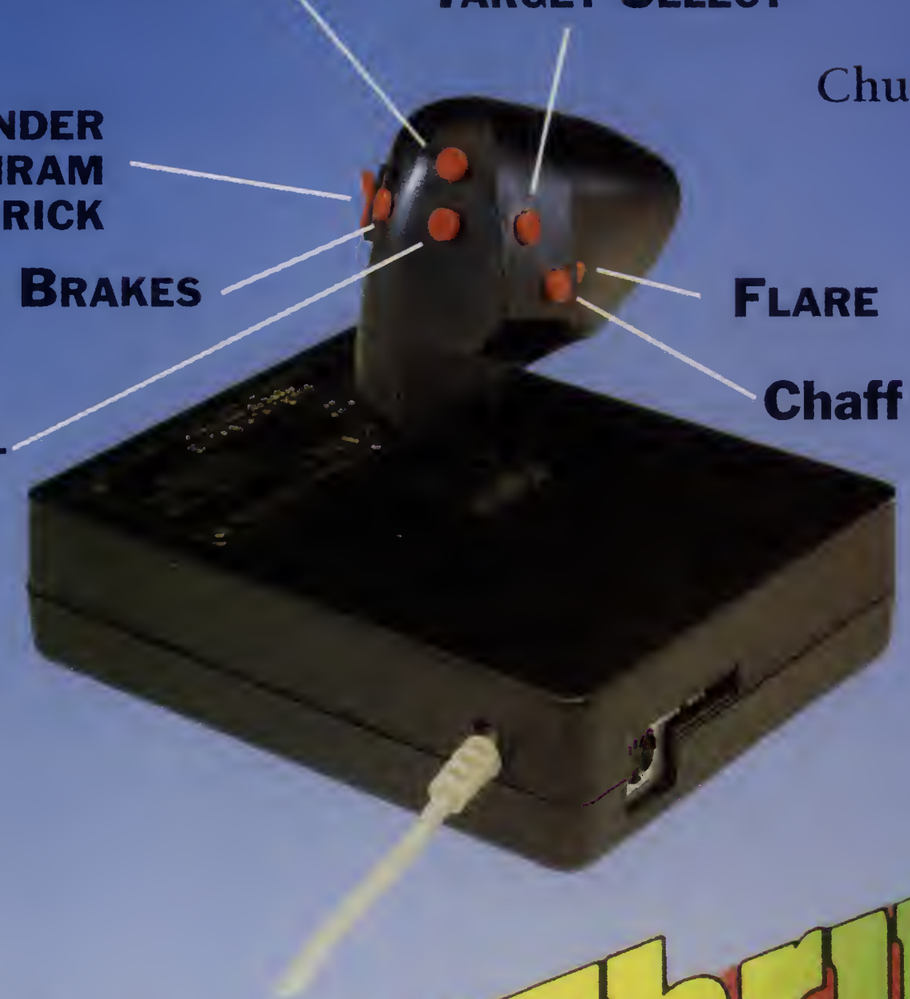
Limbo

Despite the absence of traditional whiz-bang wargame features like artillery, paratroops, or mutant camels, **Capture The Flag** offers a surprising number of tactical options which are, perhaps, more akin to football (aka soccer) than war.

My own preferred strategy is to leave my best players in defence to capture opponents and then to launch a counter-attack whilst several opposition members are in limbo. This is known in football circles as 'hitting them on the break'.

Whilst I would not claim it is a game that will keep the player up until the early hours of the morning, it is one which will fill many a lunch hour. ❑





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Star Legions

Rumbles in real time

By Mike Woodhouse

The theme of interstellar warfare at both the strategic and tactical level continues to inspire game designers the world over. The market abounds with good (and rather less than good) examples. **Star Legions** sits at the low end of strategy and the high end of tactics.

Slag heap

Star Legions puts the player in the role of commander of an invading space fleet. Planets are assigned targets which must be conquered using the resources available (except in extreme circumstances, when reinforcements may be requested) in a set time. Promotion comes through achieving a consistently high level of success in carrying out the (increasingly difficult) assignments, thus adding a little role-playing 'chrome' to the proceedings.

High Command allocates forces depending on its perception of the strength of the enemy, these forces comprising varying numbers of ships and troops. Those ships not carrying infantry are used, where necessary, to bombard enemy cities as part of the 'softening-up' process, particularly on worlds with a medium-to-high level of technology, which will generally have force shields in place, making them impenetrable to ground forces. Cities may be bombarded into slag, but total destruction tends to reduce the likelihood of promotion, since the objective is to acquire operational planets, not glowing heaps of rubble.

Heavy metal

As cities are identified, troops are teleported to the surface to begin the invasion. The lightly-armed shock troops only may be teleported; warriors (the heavy brigade) need to be transported in troopships because of their extra equipment. The catch is that troopships require a secure landing area to be constructed, hence the requirement to send in shock troops to secure a suitable zone and construct the landing area. Depending on the technical level of the planet under assault, this may or may not be a straightforward task.

In the early missions the attack can be pressed on several fronts simultaneously since the enemy's forces will not be a major problem and completing the assignment in time is more of a problem (bear in mind this is a real-time, not turn based game).

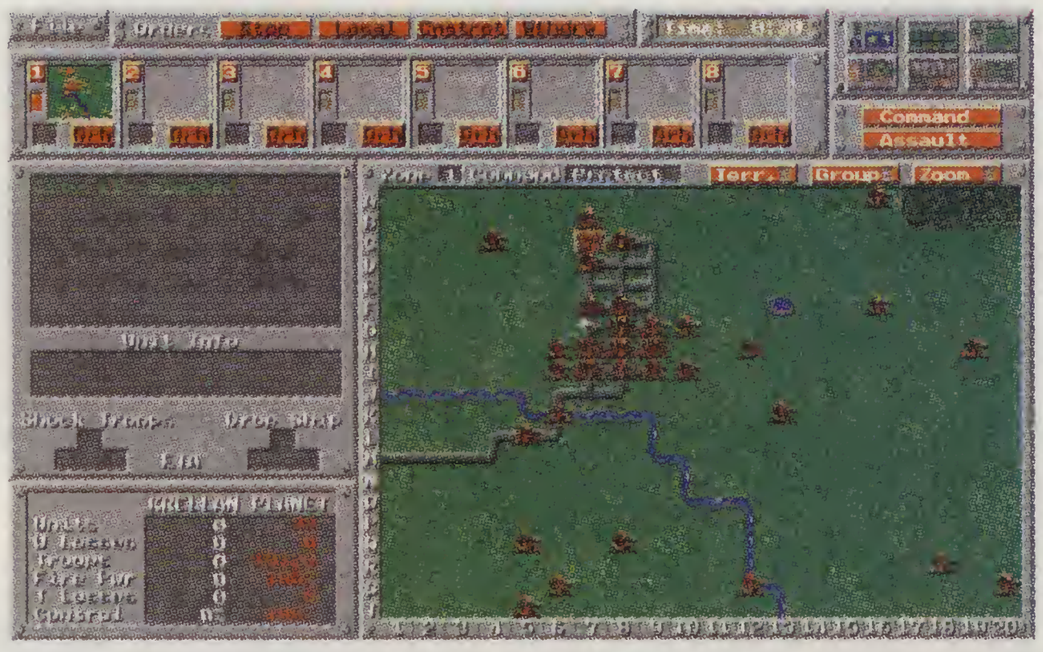
As missions are completed, the enemy will have access to regular army units (the equivalent of the invading warriors) and it will be necessary to beam down large numbers of shock troops in order to secure a bridgehead, then beam them up (and on to the next city) once the warriors have landed, leapfrogging from city to city until the planet is captured, all the while keeping an eye on the time remaining to complete the mission.

Brushed steel

Visually the game is striking - operations are carried out on six 640x480 VGA displays, each of which represents a command console for a particular type of operation. A 'brushed steel' appearance is used throughout with considerable attention to detail, even down to the screws on the panels. Switching to another panel is accompanied by some smooth scrolling (although much of this type of animation can be turned off for slower machines).

The commander is not responsible for ground-level combat at the tactical level: there is simply not enough time to concentrate on a particular area. Rather, troops are committed at a chosen location and are given instructions which dictate the combination of aggressive and defensive postures required. Once ordered, the units will proceed as ordered. If the troops have a specific objective, such as constructing a landing pad on which the warrior cohorts can land, a message is received in orbit to that effect, in order that troopships can be dispatched immediately.

The computer opponent defends with some skill, which is just as well as it doesn't have the option of attacking. I can't imagine anyone griping about this 'limitation' as artificial intelligence (at least for 386 machines) has barely progressed to the point where it could successfully conceive an attacking manoeuvre capable of defeating a 10 year old.



Empire strikes back

Mark Baldwin has been around the recreational software business for at least ten years now. He was one half (with Walter Bright) of the duo who created the classic **Empire**, which demonstrated a deep understanding of the requirements of computer game design and programming. **Empire** was the first game to earn the ultimate accolade in the Woodhouse residence: the all-night session. (Since 1983, only three programs have generated a similar level of obsession).

Although I suspect that **Star Legions** may prove ultimately to be something of a triumph of form over content, it should take an extended period of play to produce a decision either way. I expect the majority of players will thoroughly enjoy expending the necessary effort that will be required to prove or disprove my suspicion. ❑

Designed by
Supernova Creations & Mark Baldwin

Published by
Mindcraft Software

Systems
PC

Graphics
EGA, 640x480 VGA

Supports
Most soundcards, mouse

Notes
The original name of this game was Legions of Krella as was previewed as such in issue 24. The title was subsequently changed for legal reasons

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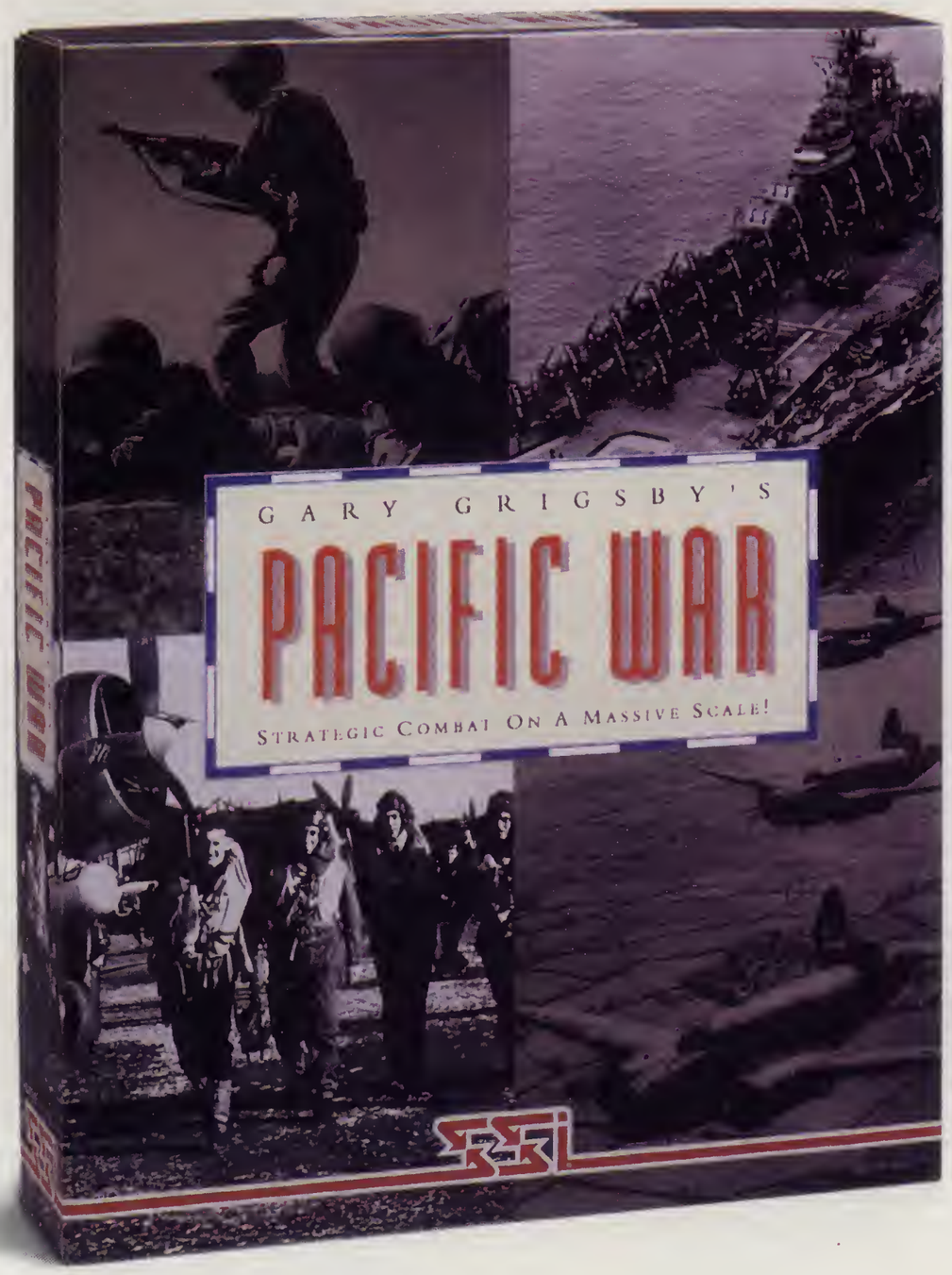

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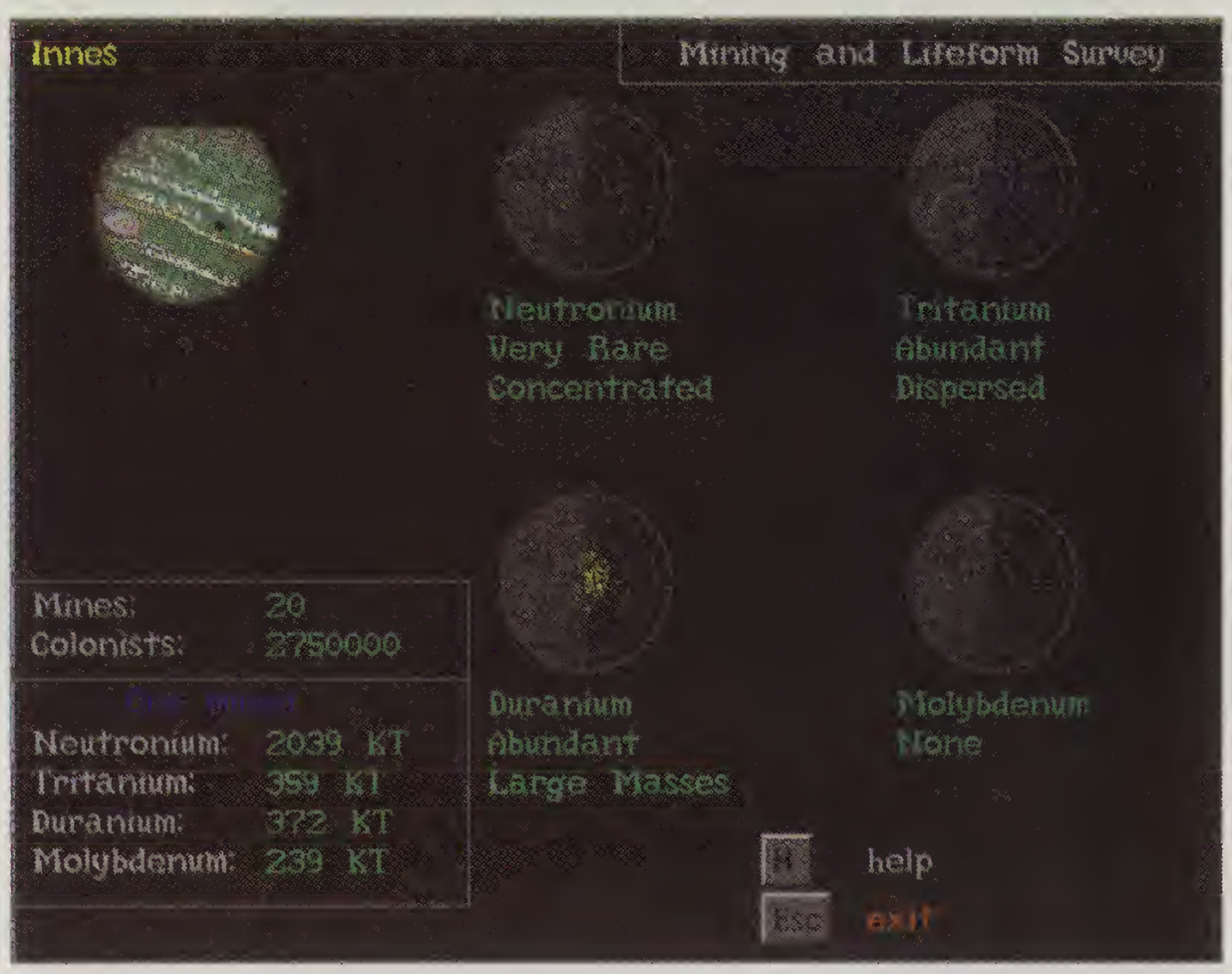
VGA Planets

Reach for the files

By Jenifer Schlickbernd



Designed by
Tim Wisseman
Shareware

Systems
PC

Graphics
VGA only

Supports
Mouse, Keyboard

Players
1-11

Availability
The shareware version costs $5 and the registered version costs from $10 from: Tim Wisseman at PO Box 204, North Fork, CA 93643, USA

VGA Planets is a Play By File Exchange space combat game, the theme and gameplay being in the tradition of SSG's **Reach for the Stars**. There are 11 player races each with a different set of starship hulls available to it. The documentation implies that the races behave differently in combat, but I have not been able to verify this. There are no victory conditions built into the game, so the players and gamemaster are free to decide when the game is over. The designer suggests that the end be called when it looks like one player is doing substantially better than the rest. Scores accumulate for building ships (more for capital ships), capturing planets, and building Starbases. Starbases cost a lot of supplies and minerals, which will need to be shipped to the planet in order to get the base built.

Planetary economy

Each planet has a type (arctic, desert, or temperate) and minerals in varying amounts. The type determines how easily people live on the planet with temperate planets having the most favorable living conditions. The minerals can be mined, and are needed to build spaceship components. Factories can be built which allow the creation of supply units, necessary for colonizing and also sellable. Colonists and natives on planets can be taxed, gaining megacredits needed to build spaceships, weapon systems, and defenses.

Starships are built at starbases. The starships can carry cargo, including supplies, colonists and minerals. There are four different tech levels at each starbase. The tech levels range from 1 to 6 in the shareware version of the game, and 1 to 10 in the registered version. One tech level is for hulls, one is for engines, one is for beam weapons and one is for torpedoes. The tech levels can be mixed and matched on a ship without penalty, and in fact doing this takes advantage of high tech engines without committing to high tech weaponry. It's much more important to be able to explore quickly at the beginning of the game than engaging in warfare. It costs a lot of megacredits to go up in tech levels, the higher the level the more it costs.

Sub standard

Each hull is unique for each race (although some races use the same hulls as other races) and designed for a specific purpose. Some hulls have lots of room for fuel and cargo, while others have torpedo launchers and fighter bays. There is no current way for anyone to design new ship hulls, but it's certainly a thought for a later upgrade.

The standard weapons on a ship are beam weapons (lasers and phasers). Most ships (except freighters) can carry them. Ships that expect to fight will have torpedo launchers, which aim and arm standard torpedoes, and/or fighter bays. Ships with fighter bays are called carriers, and the fighters can defend the ship, starbase or planet.

Each ship can perform one of eight missions including exploration, patrol, defense, kill, transportation, colonization, tow, and intercept. A ship can be either in orbit around a planet or in deep space between the planets. When looking at starcharts, others' ships can be seen too.

Speed is determined by the warp factor set. The efficiency of an engine (ie how much fuel it uses for a given warp factor) depends on the engine tech level. The higher the tech level, the more efficient the engine.

Action stations

Action in the game is simultaneous. The VCR combat between ships is really spectacular and quite satisfying. Ships can be damaged and then towed by either a friendly ship or an enemy ship (captured). There is no known algorithm for ship combat, but ships do have shields which absorb shots coming from other ships. At the beginning of the game, unless a player is stupid or desperate there is not much combat, since there are a lot of planets to explore, and each home planet has standard defenses and is easily protected. Fights will commonly break out over tasty looking planet that more than one race has found. A ship can be withdrawn from combat or another ship can join in on either side.

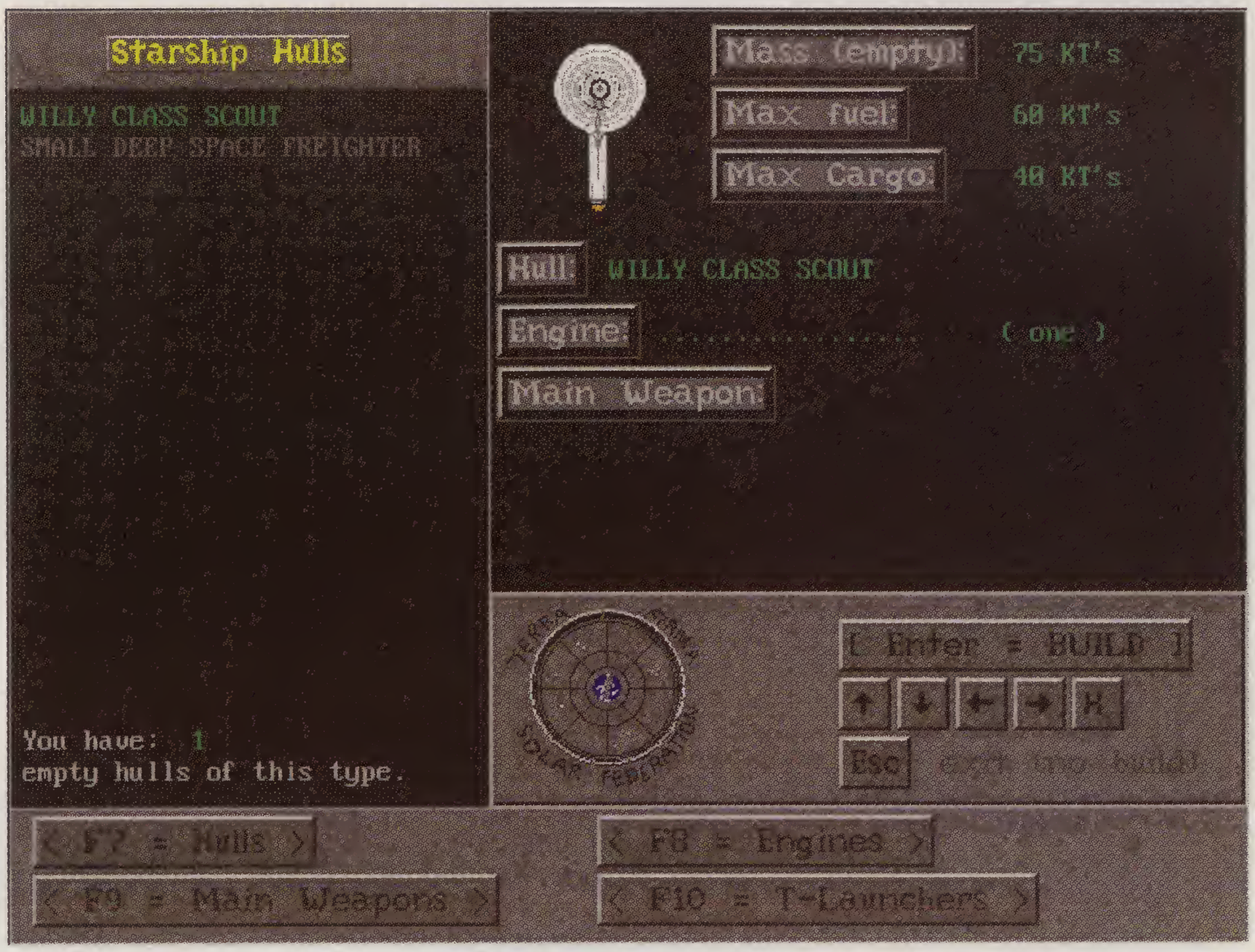
Messages can be written to each player. Alliances are easy to make and can be meaningful, since allies can exchange fuel and torpedos via starbases. Each ship and starbase is assigned a

code. If another race has this code when at the starbase the exchange is made. Ships can also be assigned primary enemies, meaning that they shoot that enemy anytime they are within range.

All exchange

The game is meant to be run by file exchange via disk, BBS, online system or at the same computer. The files are tiny (the biggest I've seen is 8k bytes), so that if players are playing on one of the systems that charge for online time, there shouldn't run be much of a bill for playing. The turns are fast to input and the interface is excellent. Help is available at all times, and the same keys work the same way, no matter what the screen.

This is an excellent game for the money. The interface looks as good as some commercial strategy games while playing against other people instead of the computer will be very challenging for most gamers. The galaxy is large (500 planets), but because of distance the playable galaxy is much smaller. Expect lots of interaction early on. ❑



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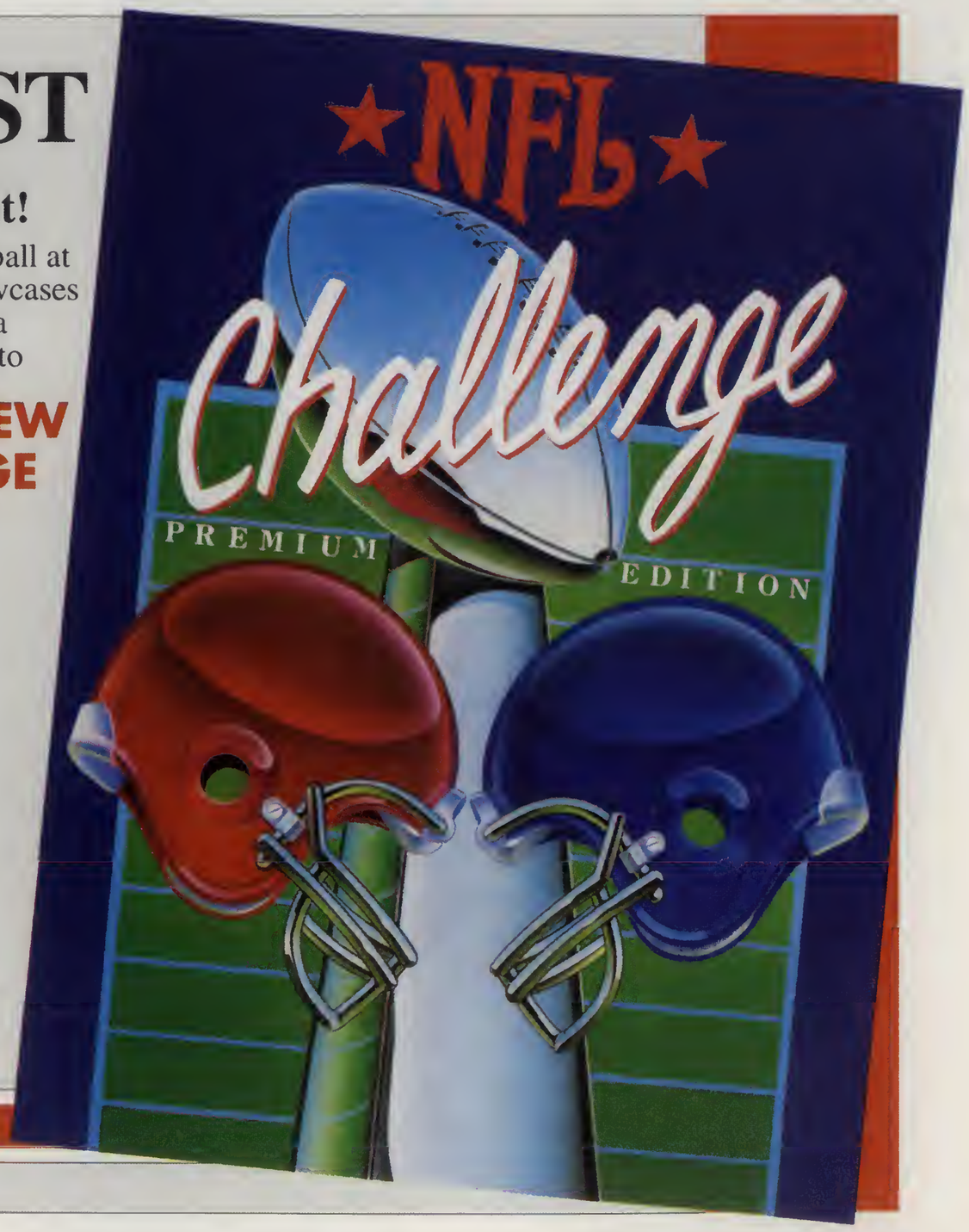

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Reader Service No. 83

A FOOT IN THE DOOR

Bruce Schlickbernd on strategy and tactics in Mindcraft's Siege

Siege is a tactical game of castle assault and de fense set in the fantasy world of The Magic Candle, Gurtex. Accurate elven archers, stubborn dwarves, masses of orcs, heroes good and bad, deadly wizards, flaming oil, siege towers, and powerful elementals are at one's command. The greatest challenge is on the attack. What follows are hints on strategy and tactics for a successful assault on a castle.

Initial strategies

Either side has a very limited amount of their total forces active at any given time. If a unit is slaughtered, another one can take its place. A breakthrough at the walls gets a player into the castle, but swift reinforcements prevent a route and the game develops into a see-saw battle of attrition. Therefore, players need to minimize their own losses and maximize the defender's. To accomplish this, local superiority is needed. The defender spreads its forces over the entire castle and will try to maintain troops at key points until its flag is threatened. The initial assault should be limited to the wall closest to the attacker's camp. This accomplishes two goals: reinforcements can arrive swiftly to exploit opportunities and plug holes, and the attackers can be concentrated on a small area in an attempt to overwhelm the opposition.

Pause the game frequently! The computer can look everywhere at once, the human attacker can't. Look around and try zooming out to a wider view. The computer defender likes to send small, hard to spot units after archers, siege weapons, and wizards. Units under the control of the player will often break or accomplish their goal and then return to camp unexpectedly. Attacking or defending an area, rather than targeting an individual units helps combat the latter.

Melee units are best around twenty or thirty individuals in size. A useful tactic once inside castle walls is to split off into smaller groups. These can pursue enemy missile units or block flanking attacks. This is far quicker than calling up another unit from camp.

Clearing the Walls

If there are moats or ditches, mobile bridges should be laid down first in two or three places. Don't place them everywhere - the defender likes to sally and melee attacking missile troops. Leave impassable areas with narrow, easily defended alleys. Small units with good armor are useful for holding these alleys.

Tactics for clearing the walls of defenders depends on what is perched up there and how it matches up against the attackers. If longbow armed troops are available, stand out of range of the defender's missile troops and feather them. Don't put up ladders yet! The defender will use these to leave the castle and melee the attacking missile troops. Care must be taken to station well-armored troops between the castle's main gate and the assaulting forces to intercept sallies. Watch for these by using the mid-view map setting so the whole front can be scanned at once.

If the defender's units have greater range than the attackers, then it is best to make a combined arms assault. Raise ladders near the defending archers and target them with melee troops. While the defenders are engaged in melee, they will not fire. Bring up missile troops and target the same unit. This will swiftly break most missile troops.

Another tactic than can be used to complement this, or be used in place of it, is to use catapults with flaming oil. Care must be taken to stay out of longbow range. A few hits can quickly decimate a large, concentrated unit. Use the attack command, and specify the center of the unit (as few as four or even one space). Blue wizards follow pretty much the same advice, though they tend to be more accurate and can have a slightly larger target area.

Inside the gates

Once the opposing missile troops have been thinned out or neutralized it's time to get serious about getting inside the castle and staying there. There's three ways to accomplish this: climb ladders, assemble a siege tower, or

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knock down the main gate. Climbing ladders is the easiest. Set them across two or three openings in the crenelated wall sections where a unit currently isn't defending. Archers shoot where the unit is, not where it is going, so dashing in and out is fairly safe so fairly small engineer units work. If troops can be spared, have small units defend the ladders so they can't be easily destroyed or used by the defender as attack avenues against besieging archers and wizards. Siege towers work pretty much the same as ladders except they are harder to destroy and shouldn't be attempted until the area has been cleared of missile troops. The battering ram adds a nice bit of color, but since troops can be moved as swiftly up narrow ladders and rickety towers as through the main gate, it isn't really necessary.

Again, keep the front restricted - if the computer opponent has troops stationed all over the walls, let them be unless they are missile troops within range. If so, those can be cleared out by splitting off small groups from units already inside the castle. Once inside the castle, the game can be a real meatgrinder. The avenues of attack are often

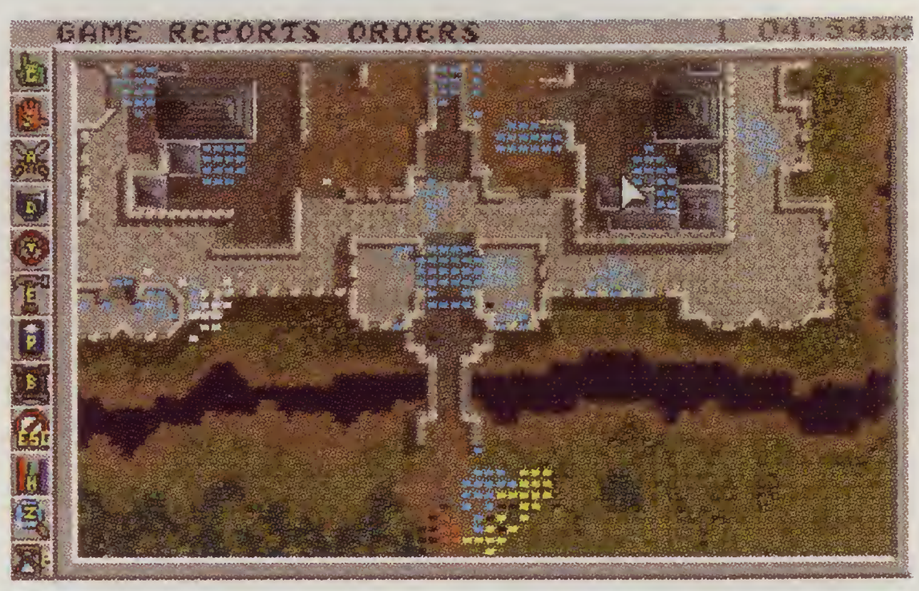
restricted and large units wasted. This is the time to start moving in more of the elite troops. It is crucial at this stage to neutralize the opposing missile troops as swiftly as possible while stationing your own safely but within range to support your troops engaged in melee. Spiders are useful at getting at missile troops hidden behind walls.

If the defenders are in large, dense units, flaming oil and fireball-throwing wizards can be used to maximum effect. Always save a few of these for this task.

Blue wizards and their dark counterpart, Jerrahs take special care. Both can quickly destroy massed enemy troops. Both are extremely fragile and explode spectacularly when killed. Be prepared to follow the progress of either closely since the computer defender will go all out to destroy them. Detailing a unit to escort these magicians is prudent. If an enemy missile unit is nearby, either stay out of range, or maneuver another unit closer to draw the fire.

When facing either of these magician types, kill them as quickly as possible! The computer will usually save these until the castle's flag is threatened, then out they come blasting friend and foe alike. Split off units to attack them, direct missile fire in their direction, or (my favorite) send in oil-bearing suicide squad engineers. If these die next to the wizards, their spilled oil often sets off a truly dazzling chain reaction of exploding wizards!

Once the main courtyard has been cleared, set a unit to defend the space around the flag and send in a squad of engineers (escort them with elite troops if possible) with the flag. Flood the area around the flag with as many



troops as possible (assuming any blue wizards or jerrahs have been dealt with) and weather the storm until victory is achieved!

Special tactics, and final thoughts

Missile troops aim at the current location of a unit - they don't 'lead' the target. It is easy to march a unit back and forth to draw fire and never be hit. This requires a fair amount of personal attention, but is great for wasting the opponent's flaming oil supply. Conversely, a wizard can be brought quite close and dodge short distances and fire once before dodging again. An opposing missile unit can be worn down in this fashion.

Engineers carrying flaming oil set off chain reactions when they die. The oil they were carrying spills, killing the next engineer and subsequent neighbors. Target enemy units with flaming oil immediately in an attempt to set off this type of reaction. Conversely, don't make catapult units with masses of oil-bearing engineers. Have units of five or so engineers join the catapult unit. When the oil is used up, split off the excess engineers, return them to camp, and bring up five more with oil. By cycling the engineers in this fashion, chain-reaction losses can be minimized.

The most important tactic is to bring as many troops as possible to bear on an opposing unit as possible while screening the rest. Always use 'combined arms' - support melee troops with missile troops. If there isn't room in the narrow confines of a castle, bring up available troops as close as possible so they can be thrown into the line or defend the avenues into the castle. Don't expect to sweep the defenders away in the first assault - the large stockpile of reserves rewards a methodical, conservative approach.

Siege rewards clever play and punishes mistakes. These are strategies and tactics that I have found to work, but by no means are they the final word. The joy is in the experimentation and setting increasingly more difficult challenges for oneself. ❑

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Reader Service No. 87

CARRIERS IN ACTION

Gerry Dorris replays the Battle for Midway in SSG's Carriers at War

Carriers at War by the Strategic Studies Group is a game focusing on World War II fleet carrier operations. The game includes six separate scenarios plus a variant for each scenario covering the major confrontations between the Japanese and US forces in the South Pacific.

The following describes typical game play during one of the scenarios: The Battle for Midway. The decisions made are not intended to be the 'best' solutions nor will faithfully following them in another game result in the same outcome. There is enough variation during play (eg whether a bomb or torpedo hits its target) to completely change the remaining game. However, **Carriers at War** has a surprising amount of depth and attention must be paid to details for consistent results.

For those not familiar with South Pacific battles the manual for **Carriers at War** contains a superb overview of the actual events. The Japanese were considered invincible until the Coral Sea encounter. Although arguably a draw it was a major disappointment for the Japanese. In an effort to regain momentum and draw out the US forces for a decisive victory the Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN) decided to amass their forces and invade Midway Island. The US would never tolerate a Japanese base so near Pearl Harbor and would be forced to attack. The greatly over matched US forces would be annihilated!

It is not widely known but the US had broken the Japanese message codes and were able to read over 90% of the 'secret' messages. Obviously, this was an incredible advantage. The US knowing that Midway was about to be attacked hurriedly pulled together a naval task group centered on the three available US carriers: Yorktown, Enterprise and Hornet using nearly any ship that could float. It was an all or nothing endeavor for the US. A loss would be disastrous for either side.

On the evening of June 3, 1942 an outnumbered US task group was several hundred miles to the north east of Midway Island preparing to counter the might of the IJN. Thus the stage was set for the Battle of Midway!

June 3, 1942 2100 hours

My objective is simple enough. Stop the Japanese invasion of Midway. As Commander of the naval and land based forces I decide to have a situation review...I wish I hadn't! Intelligence reports indicate that I am facing the pride of the IJN. There will be four undamaged fleet carriers plus two light carriers. They are supported by 3 battleships, four battle cruisers and ten heavy cruisers! Their fleet is also amply supplied with light cruisers and destroyers.

My naval Task Group consists of my two fleet carriers: the Enterprise and the Hornet plus two heavy cruisers. I have a secondary cruiser Task Force with three additional heavy cruisers. Another Task Force centered on the still damaged Yorktown contains two more heavy cruisers. There is also a small collection of destroyers and support ships. On land I have a scattering of planes at the Midway airfield plus some bombers that can be spared from Pearl. It seems a pitifully small force to stop the 'invincible' Imperial Japanese Navy! I'm resigned that my forces will suffer heavy losses.

There are also 11 allied subs in the area but they are not under my command.

I have no idea how many IJN subs are deployed but I ignore them since I can't do anything about them in any case. I just hope I don't run into one and have a carrier sunk!

Even the weather is against me! I find that I am in the clear but a storm front is to the north west of Midway covering the approach of the IJN. Hopefully this will change before dawn since my entire strategy is based upon surprise. My forces must remain hidden long enough to get within range of the enemy carriers and make at least one crippling strike.

June 4, 1942 00:10 hours

My first good news! The weather to the north west of Midway is clearing. The front is heading in my direction. Perhaps I will be able to keep my forces hidden?

I decide to join all my naval forces in one large unit. Hopefully the maneuver will provide more air and flak protection. It may also distribute an enemy attack among more targets and spare a carrier???

I can't decide on speed. Should I run at 30 knots and be sure of being in range, perhaps overrunning the enemy, or continue at 15 knots and not be in strike range? If located quickly my forces simply cannot withstand a consolidated enemy attack. I decide to continue on at 15 knots. This is a decision that will trouble me for the remainder of the battle.

June 4, 1942 05:00 hours

I decide to increase speed to 30 knots and change course slightly to west south west to try and reach the storm front. Midway is clear. I also order all fighters on Midway to prepare for an emergency CAP (combat air

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patrol). I know they can't hold off the dawn attack but Midway won't come free!!

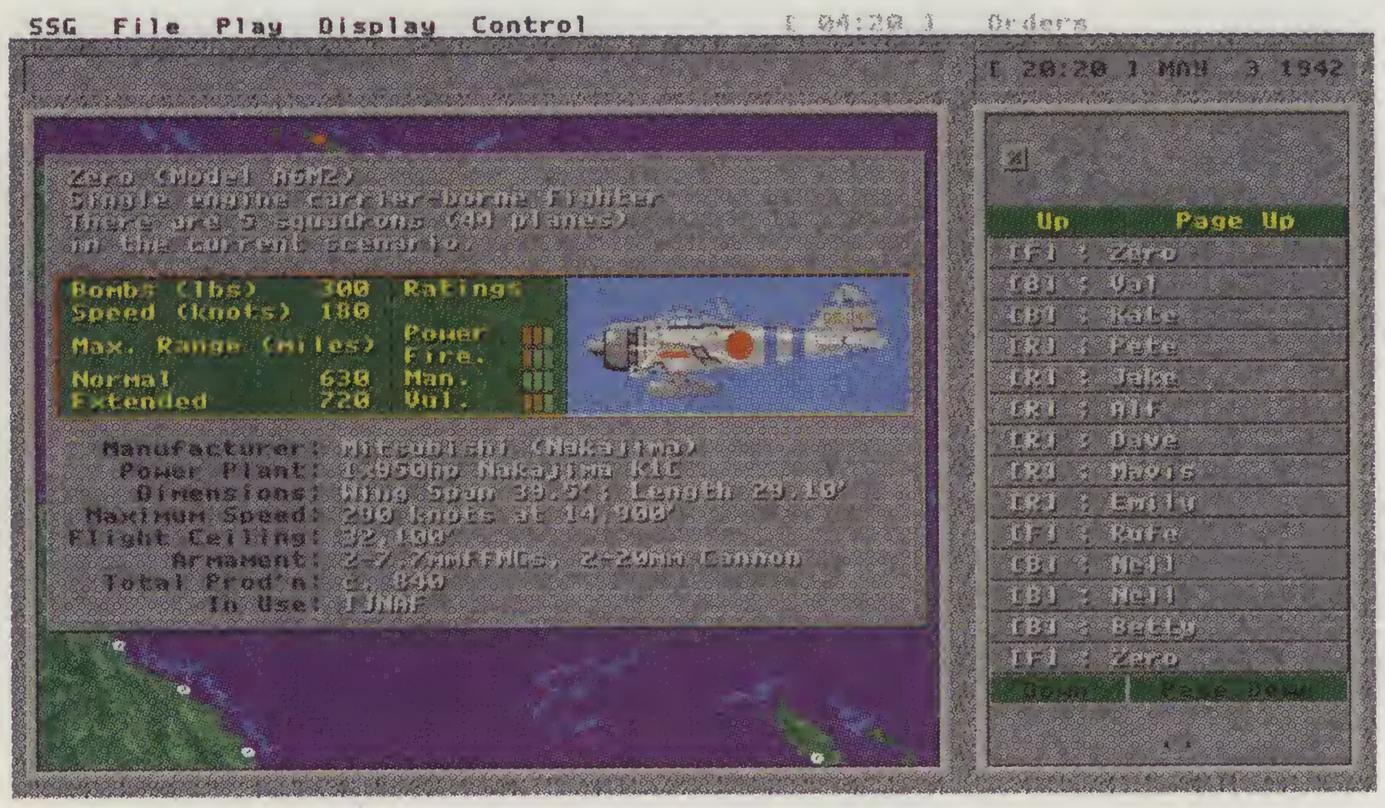
All carrier aircraft have been ordered armed and fueled in an effort to launch as quickly as possible once the enemy carriers are sighted. If attacked with these planes on deck even a single hit will likely lose a carrier.

I have ordered my seaplane tender to anchor and launch search planes at dawn.

I have also assigned search sectors for my carriers. I hate wasting bombers for this but I absolutely must find those enemy carriers at first light!

June 4, 1942 06:30 hours

Still no sightings! Suddenly, Midway reports inbound enemy planes...160 of them! One of Midway's seaplanes reports a large heavy cruiser group but no carriers. The Japanese bombers blow right by the Midway CAP. There are some enemy losses. Many of the CAP are reported lost. Another enemy cruiser group is sighted behind the first. I wonder if this is really the carriers?



June 4, 1942 07:00 hours

I believe my forces have been sighted by an enemy search plane. If the IJN can strike first all is lost. At least I know where 160 enemy planes are! I order all fighters up on emergency CAP.

June 4, 1942 07:35 hours

Where are they!!!! I now have four heavy cruiser groups sighted to the north west of Midway but no carriers. I'm certain at least one of these is a carrier group but which one? Should I chance a strike at one of these. If I pick the wrong one the retaliatory strike will finish me. I decide to wait just a little longer.

June 4, 1942 07:55

Finally!!! One of the cruiser groups now contains 4 carriers. I check and find they are at 240 miles. This is the maximum range for my dive bombers with normal loads but well outside fighter and torpedo bomber range. They will have to go in with no fighter coverage. Not many will return...the strike is ordered.

In an all out effort I also order the bombers on Midway to attack as well. Being mostly level bombers I know they won't be very effective but who knows???

I notice that one enemy heavy cruiser group is heading at flank speed directly at my Task Group. I alter course towards Midway to try and open some water between us. I definitely don't want to get involved with them at this stage. A total of 87 dive bombers will launch. 21 others are either searching or being readied.

June 4, 1942 08:50

Sightings continue to pour in. I'm now told that there are 7 (!) carriers in the group I'm attacking. There are also 4 new sightings to the south west of Midway. Finally my strike is in the air. There is little to do now but wait for the expected Japanese attack. I can't understand why it has taken so long to arrive. Perhaps my change in course caused them to miss me earlier???

June 4, 1942 09:10

I now have a total of 10 enemy naval sightings! It seems like the entire IJN fleet is out here. Do I stand a chance??? Air Warning!!!! 20 enemy bombers inbound. All CAP is up. The wait is over. My fate will be decided very shortly.

June 4, 1942 09:20

60 bombers now reported inbound. The Enterprise is under attack. She is hit and burning. Multiple misses on the Hornet and Yorktown. Two heavy cruisers are bombed. Many Japanese aircraft are shot down but they keep coming.

June 4, 1942 09:40

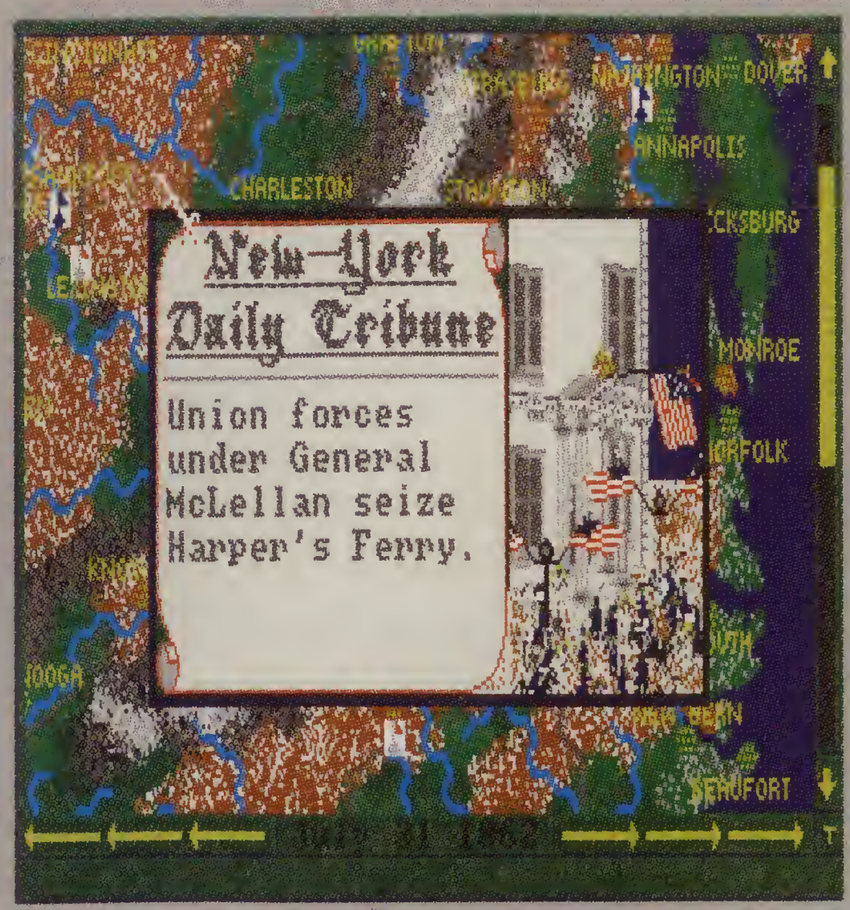
The Enterprise is lost! She has just taken another bomb plus three torpedo hits and is burning violently. The Hornet has just been missed by 4 torpedoes and along with the Yorktown is still undamaged. The first enemy attack is over. I hope my planes do at least as well.

June 4, 1942 10:15

My strike has finally reached the enemy carrier group. Both the Midway and carrier bombers arrive simultaneously. They suffer severe losses but break through. The Akagi is hit by 3 bombs, the Soryu by 4 bombs, Kaga by a torpedo and the Hiryu by a single bomb. All carriers are at least damaged. My intelligence reports them sunk but I know better than that! What is left of my air strike heads back.

June 4, 1942 11:00

I now have 12 sightings of enemy naval groups converging on Midway. Suddenly another air warning...my carriers are under attack again!!! The Hornet is hit by 3 bombs and the Yorktown by one bomb! Fortunately the Yorktown is still operational but the Hornet has been



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Amiga

Reader Service No. 49

critically damaged. She is barely afloat and unable to sustain air operations. I guess this is the end.

June 4, 1942 12:20

I'm still waiting to recover my strike planes. The enemy heavy cruiser group is still closing. Those battleships will quickly finish my Task Group. They can stand off out of gun range and shell us. The danger is becoming critical.

June 4, 1942 14:35

I'd really like another shot at the enemy carriers but can't afford to ignore the cruiser group. I had ordered a strike of the few remaining dive bombers plus the torpedo bombers against the cruisers and it finally arrives. They achieve two bomb hits on both a battle cruiser and a heavy cruiser.

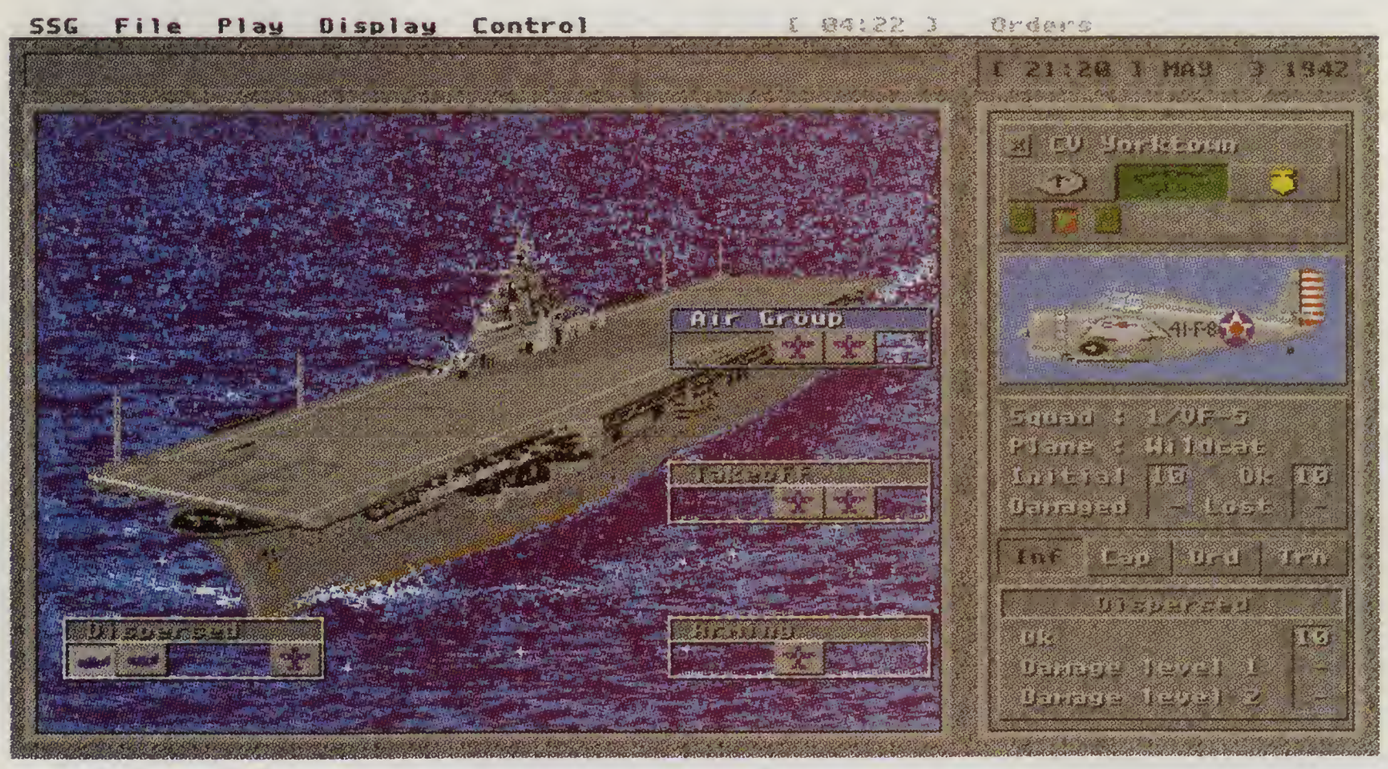
The enemy cruiser group now changes course and begins moving quickly to the north west. The enemy carriers are also breaking off and heading to the north west. Perhaps I might survive this after all?

June 4, 1942 15:10

Submarine Tambor claims it has sunk an enemy destroyer. Shortly afterwards submarine Cuttlefish reports sinking a heavy cruiser. The Cuttlefish is lost.

June 4, 1942 16:00

A Midway strike reaches the retreating carrier group. No hits. I manage another strike at the retreating cruiser group and achieve 4 more hits but I don't believe any ships sunk. Although the north west groups are retiring there are still forces moving towards Midway from the south west. I must get back to protect Midway from the invasion.



June 5, 1942 7:10

Level bombers that I ordered transferred to Midway from Pearl are still on the way. I should have had them moved yesterday but forgot in all the action! I must talk to my staff about doing everything myself!!! I locate two groups close to Midway. One group consists of 10 destroyers and a light cruiser. The other has 14 troop transports. I start a series of air attacks on these forces.

Much of the day is spent in fruitless attempts to sink the destroyers and transports with bombers. I finally decide to move in my heavy cruisers and finish them off. After several surface encounters the transports and the light cruiser are sunk. The destroyers are too fast to approach.

I don't understand why the enemy forces to the south west don't engage. Not only do they have battleships but there are also light carriers among them.

I can only assume that their intelligence is as spotty as mine. They must not be aware of my large aircraft losses nor the condition of my carriers. Fortunately they stay out of it.

On June 6, 1942 at 21:00 hours the Battle for Midway ends. I have been awarded a decisive victory with -73 victory points (a marginal victory was -100 or less so I barely made it). The final results are:

	US		Japanese	
	Damaged	Destroyed	Damaged	Destroyed
Carriers	2	1	4	-
Cruisers	2	-	7	-
Planes	-	224	-	125
Ships	-	-	2	17

In hindsight, I needed to have located the Japanese carriers sooner. If I caught them with their planes being readied on deck or managed to damage them while their planes were in the air I might have saved the Enterprise or the Hornet. The heavy loss of aircraft also left me virtually defenseless. If my opponent had pressed with the remainder of his forces I would have been finished.

Maybe I should have run at 30 knots all night? That could have proved interesting. I would undoubtedly have sighted the carriers sooner and perhaps caught them with their aircraft in transit from Midway. As well, I would have been close enough to use all my planes including fighter escorts and torpedo bombers.

On the other hand, even a small Japanese attack would devastate my force with all planes sitting readied on deck. Even if I survived the air threat my Task Group would have been right in the middle of several groups of battle ships and heavy cruisers. There was also the chance that my force might blunder upon one of the enemy groups in the dark.

It is interesting to compare these results to the historical values. The Japanese experienced a series of incredible bad luck, poor execution and horrible decisions that culminated in a disaster at Midway. The Japanese lost all four carriers, a heavy crusier, 234 aircraft and 22,000 sailors!

The US carrier Yorktown was badly damaged and later sunk by a Japanese sub. The US aircraft losses were severe but didn't compare to those of the Japanese. Midway was the turning point for the US in the South Pacific; it was also a defeat from which the Japanese never recovered. ❑

Trade Up!

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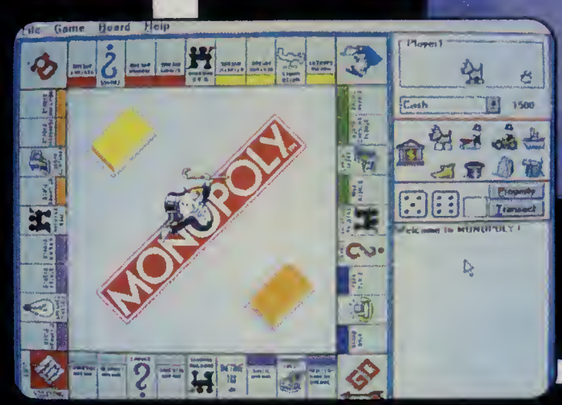
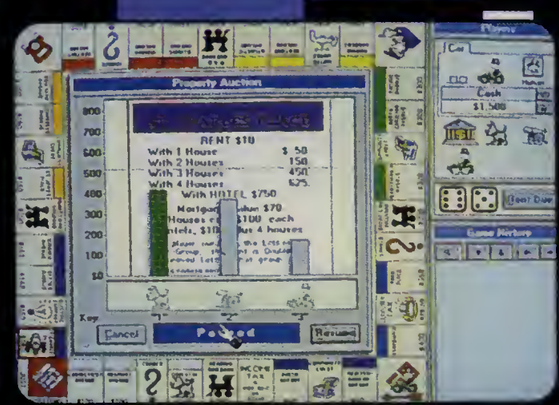
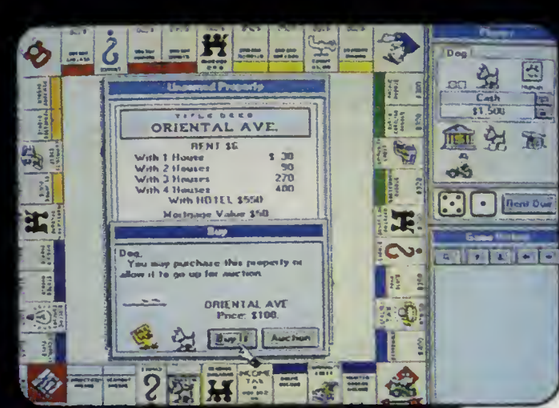


WINDOWS ™ version

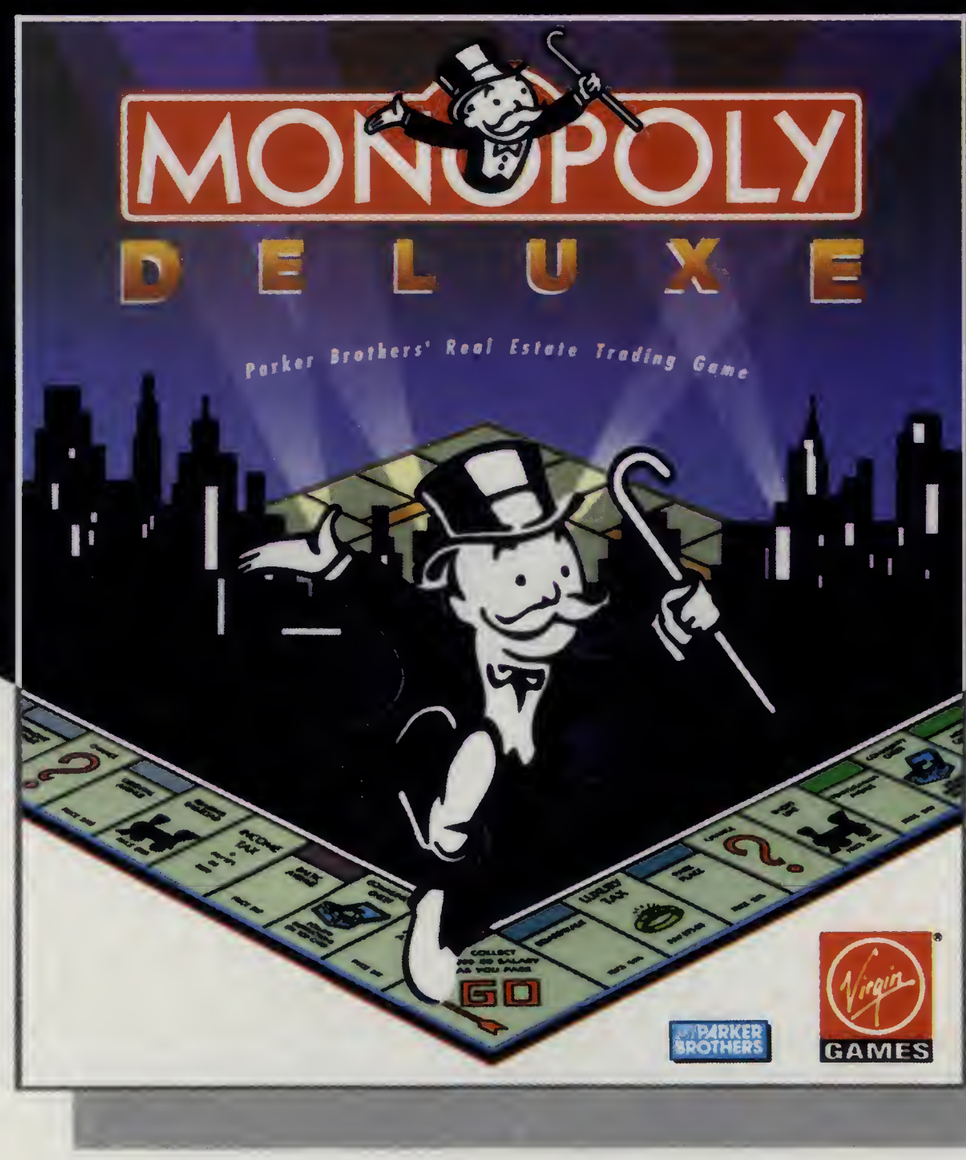


IBM PC version

WINDOWS ™ version



IBM PC version



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Reader Service No. 87

Cobra Mission

The land of the rising nipple

by Steven Wartofsky

Designed by
Erwin Mab, Kenny Wu

Artwork by
Hang Peng, Team 0-two, Team Rai-Chee

Published by
Megatech

Systems
PC 286

Graphics
EGA, VGA, MCGA

Supports
Sound Blaster, Sound Blaster Pro, AdLib, Media Vision Pro Audio Spectrum, Covox Sound Master II, Mouse

We've seen plenty of mild cheesecake in computer adventure games already. Whether it be the scenes in Sierra's **Conquest of Camelot**, Dynamix' adventures, Accolade's **Les Manley Lost in L.A.**, or Legend's **Spellcasting** series, the display of women's somewhat unclothed bodies for the pleasure of (one must assume) a primarily heterosexual male audience has happened here as it has everywhere else in American culture.

No nudes is bad nudes

The problem is, as is the case in advertising, television, the movies, magazines and elsewhere in our culture, such displays have always reeked of a mild (or not so mild) hypocrisy. Rather than going all out, and suggesting that both men's and women's bodies of all sizes, shapes, colors and qualities are beautiful, worth looking at, worth enjoying, worth being aroused by, worth being familiar with (both Phidias and Michelangelo agree on this point, if memory serves), and ultimately no big deal, we fetishize a few locations on a narrowly-conceived version of one gender's physiognomy and define 'sexually interesting' by a culture-wide obsession over whether or not those locations are made visible or not (i.e. 'sexy' means 'a breast is visible' or the like), and by who has control over that visibility. This heavily property-based notion of eroticism is at the root of all evil in America. Join a nudist camp next summer and start the path to recovering your sanity.

Between extremes

Oh - right - this is a game review *(but do carry on - Ed).* Well anyways, the point of all this is that **Cobra Mission**, a new adventure/CRPG game imported from Japan, provides reassurance that we are not alone in our confusion. The difference is, young Asian males have made a real art out of it; there's a heavily stylized form of erotic cartoon that's extensively popular in Japan, which takes for granted what those on both the extreme right and extreme left would find grounds for spontaneous self-combustion. It's exaggerated, it's rude, it's.... oddly harmonious. There's a concern with line and simplicity and the balance of weight in the representation that's downright beautiful sometimes. Scary thought.

Cobra Mission is replete with images of this kind, almost entirely of women, unfortunately (maybe a sequel should be Cobra Mission II: For Women's Eyes Only).

Whereas previously the display of some flesh has been intended to serve as the carrot dangling before the hetero male's nose to keep him playing the game for the sake of that one funky scene, here the exaggerated cartoon representation of same is so pervasive that it quickly becomes almost a parody of this kind of voyeuristic Victorian titillation. Even with all that, **Cobra Mission** is still pleasantly R-rated, unlikely to seduce any player into ending up working in Larry Flynt's living room.

Self manipulation

Once past the few minutes' worth of thrill that experiencing this kind of cartoon eroticism provides, we finally get to the qualities of the game itself, and this is where **Cobra Mission** proves to be quite an original. The game is hard to describe as either a CRPG or an Adventure, as there are elements of both in the design. There's a story line to be followed, and though time spent gathering objects, manipulating stats, managing inventory and party control, etc. is less than that in the average current RPG (one's party consists of a male and female character, the former the in-game player representative, the latter his high-school sweetheart; these two work together as the team on the mission), all the basic elements of RPG play are still there (well, no spell-casting).

On the other hand, as with many current graphic adventures, the manipulation of objects has as its goal the movement of the player from one graphic arena to another, as part of the development of the scenario.

What's most fascinating about the design is the way in which the anima-

tion works. Unlike what we're used to - a richly drawn and essentially static backdrop, against which a number of moving animated objects and elements are formulated - **Cobra Mission** provides a series of static screens which represent sequences of motion. The net effect is classic comic book: as one plays, and engages in various kinds of encounters (battles, love scenes, etc.), the results of actions taken are like moving from one cartoon frame to the next. Fans of comics will be delighted by this, I'm sure.

Topless viewpoint

These aspects of the game are discovered through the operation of the player's party of two, who move through the game like a couple of little Mario-like figures (ie they are short, squashed symbolic Nintendo or arcade-game representations of the party). The movement from area to area in the game takes place from an overhead perspective, and various locations are entered along the way to find tools, weapons, information, etc. Entering such locations, or running into NPCs of various sorts, initiates the above-mentioned cartoon sequences.

A variety of interesting animation effects are also included as part of the design. Early on, for instance, the player may find a telescope which can be used to take a gander at the topless beauties on the beach nearby. Using the telescope blanks the screen down to a small circle (representing the view through the telescope), which can be moved across the screen to look around. In other places, the player's battles produce some rather explicit representations of animated violence (nothing that would outmatch anything from the **Elvira/Waxworks** series of CRPGs from Horrorsoft/Accolade, fortunately). As with these games, hitting a character in different places has different effects on NPC stats.

Love thy neighbor

The cartoon exaggerations here, as elsewhere, are truly parodic. Gameplay itself is smooth and relatively seamless; difficulty levels are not set so high at the start that alot of replaying of familiar scenes is necessary, and the series of encounters along the way are often gloriously rude. This is a game for adults in the most benevolent sense, in that those who can distinguish between fantasy and reality (and who have no plans, for instance, to join the Air Force after playing **Falcon 3.0** so they can blow up real T-80s) will enjoy the stylizations of each encounter without worrying whether or not they're being brainwashed into something less than cheerful companionship with all other creatures on the planet.

Cobra Mission comes on six high-density disks, and requires a full twelve megabytes of hard disk to install. It is a refreshingly frank celebration of reveling in adolescent male erotic fantasy in one of its more cheerful, silly incarnations.

No-one in their right mind would behave like most of the characters in this game in the real world, but isn't that the whole point? ❑

Spellcasting 301

Spring break

By Gregg Ellsworth

Just when I think the game world is settling down into predictability the more interesting software houses manage to pull something new on me.

Despite bug problems, **Ultima VII** represented an advancement in game technology. Likewise, **Wizardry VII:Crusaders of the Dark Savant** promises to offer plenty of new goodies. Competition for the consumer dollar these days seems to be forcing the game manufacturers to stay on their toes, pushing the machines to their limits, trying new things to improve their products.

Florid - a

Legend Entertainment isn't sitting still either. After having success with what might be described as 'text adventures with graphics' games already they aren't content to just keep plugging new stories into the same interface. While I would most likely still enjoy anything they put out that had the quality writing that I enjoyed in **Timequest**, **Gateway**, and the **Spellcasting** series, they seem quite at ease tinkering with proven success. Is this a bad thing? Looking at Ernie Eaglebeak's latest adventure, I think not!

Spellcasting 301:Spring Break sends the ultimate nerd to Fort Naughtytail for a well-deserved vacation. After all, his first two years at Sorcerer University have been rather hectic, having thwarted his stepfather's evil schemes twice. The unwilling hero has managed to survive the past year and a half without further mishap, and is joining the boys of Hu Delta Phart on their pilgrimage to the ultimate student paradise. Will the aspiring sorcerer get lucky with the beach babes? Not if the guys from Getta Loda Yu have anything to say about it. The muscle-bound 'students' from St. Weinersburg have no intention of letting the Pharts on the sand at all, and how's a guy gonna score in his hotel room? Fortunately, a bikini-clad referee known as 'The Judge' proposes a series of contests between the two fraternities for the title of 'King of the Beach', with the losers being banned from the student hot spot.

This sets the scene for a truly entertaining series of quests, where the player must help Ernie in a battle of wits and magic for the mastery of the sands. The author of the previous **Spellcasting** games, Steve Meretzky, shows the player no mercy in the humor depart-

Written and designed by
Steve Meretzky

Published by
Legend Entertainment

Systems
PC

Graphics
VGA, EGA, VESA compatible super VGA

Supports
RealSound, Sound Blaster, Adlib, Roland MT-32, Mouse

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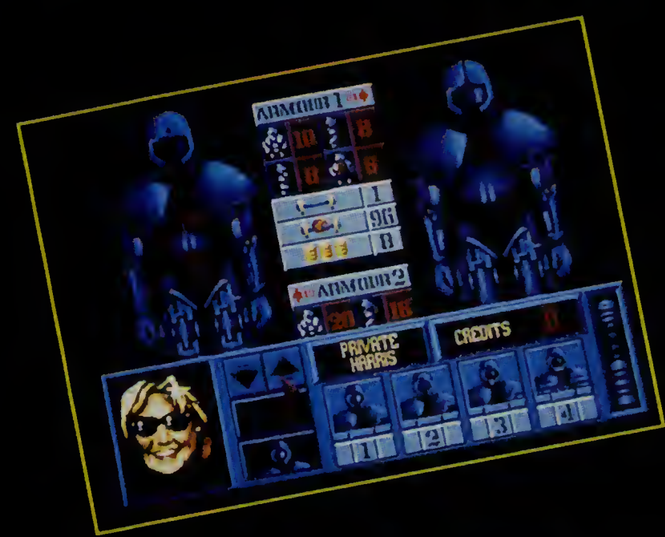

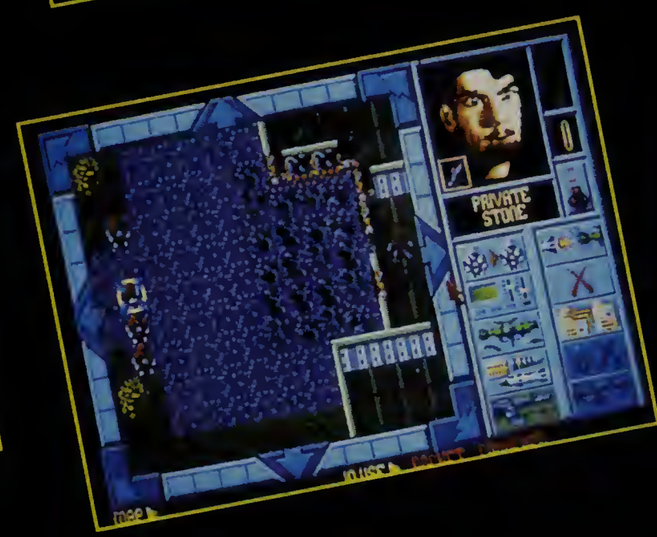

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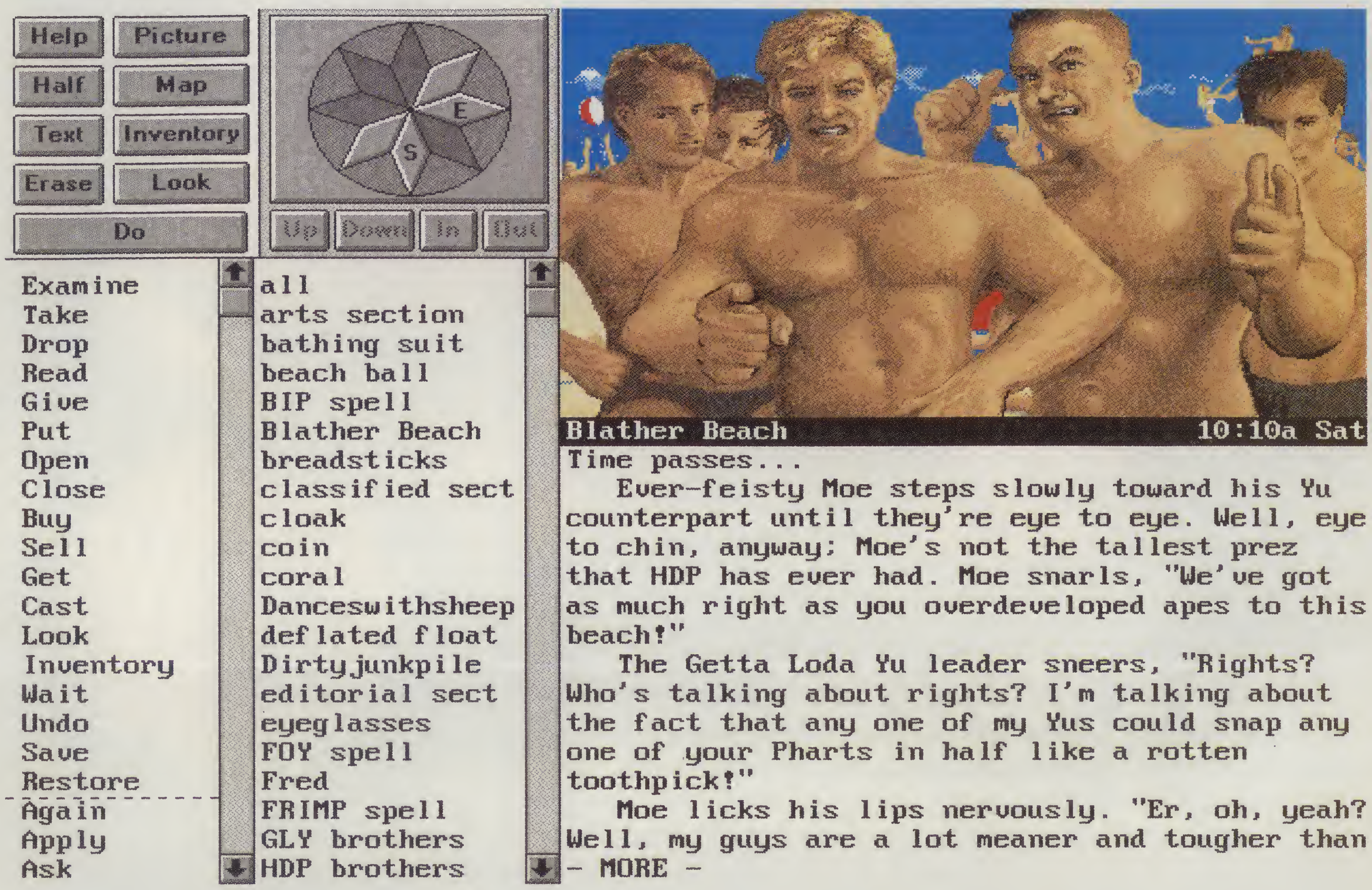
MINDCRAFT

2291 205th Street, Suite 201, Torrance, CA 90501

Actual screen photos from the IBM VGA version.

Reader Service No. 10



ment. The game is filled with pages of funny text to read, and most of it will probably go unnoticed by a player who's in a hurry.

Stripping yarns

Spellcasting 301 was written to appeal to several levels of puzzle solvers, as not all the contests need to be won in order to finish. The game's scoring system reflects this, displaying the points amassed by Ernie and his fratmates and those of the Yus. Some points are awarded for partially solving a puzzle or for getting a needed item, and when the game is done the player is told what areas he could have improved upon. This not only adds a replay value to the adventure, but should allow a relative novice gamer to finish it without becoming discouraged. Those with a full slate of other games to play might zip through this one and return to try the harder problems later.

The layout of the game environment also allows the player access to most areas and objects right away. This should placate those who complained about the tightly timed format of the first two games in this series. Since there is no real pressure to win each day's contest, they can spend time exploring and trying out partial solutions. When players feel they know enough to complete a puzzle, they can restore from a previously saved position and continue on.

Of course, there is a surprise ending to the game which will probably catch the player unaware. While he is busy helping Ernie with the daily events, something's happening behind the scenes that's completely invisible. Regardless of the progress made in the beach competition, Ernie finally must face up to an ultimate challenge in the endgame.

Button pusher

Adding to the entertainment value of the humorous writing and the ingenious puzzles is the game interface itself. Commands may be entered via keyboard or mouse, from a menu of verbs and nouns or by pointing at the objects in the displayed picture. If all else fails, the player can resort to simple typed commands, as the game parser does a very good job in figuring out what he wants to do. At points in the story, the player uses a full screen interface to enter commands by pushing 'buttons', and this makes **Spring Break** easier to play as well.

As if this weren't enough value for the gaming dollar, the artwork is full color VGA, with game segments intercut by digitized photographs. A continuous music score and realistic sound effects complete the atmosphere, pushing this beyond just a text adventure. Bob Bates, co-founder of Legend Entertainment, believes all these enhancements qualify **Spellcasting 301** as a multimedia graphics adventure at least as good as what other companies have put out.

I must agree, there are so many ways to interact with the game, and when all the sound and graphics are accounted for the conclusion is obvious: this game is a winner. ❑

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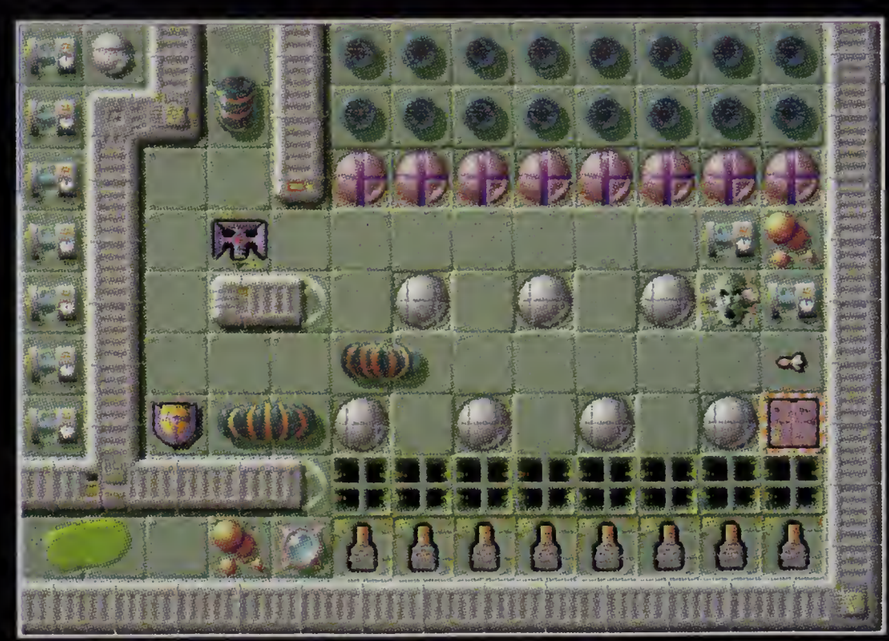

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Reader Service No. 62

Spellcraft

Aspects of Valor

By Theo Clarke

The aspects of valour in this context are wisdom, resource fulness, courage and compassion. **Spellcraft** is the story of the hero of the Oracle, who embodies the aspects of valour. His name is Robert Garwin. For years he has lived a modest life of no great accomplishment and no great danger. Then, one day his life changes. Forever ... In the morning mail he finds a letter from England and an airline ticket. The letter reads - 'You are the last of our family. A great heritage awaits you. Come quickly. Follow these instructions ...' The letter is signed 'Your loving uncle, Gar'.

Stoned again

Robert never even knew he had relatives in England. After a moment of indecision, he decides to follow his uncle's advice and he begins packing. He flies to Heathrow Airport drives a rented car south-west towards Salisbury Plain. His uncle has promised to meet him at the ancient stone circle known as Stonehenge. After a few hours travel, he sees the tall stones of Stonehenge loom above the horizon. In his excitement he is barely conscious of the thick fog billowing over the plain toward the megalithic monument.

He stops the car and begins walking across the field. The fog has now veiled most of the monument. It is unearthly quiet here. No one greets him. No-one warns him to stay out. As though a hand has waved it aside, the fog clears. 'Forward!' a voice orders from inside the circle. He obeys. The interior of the monument seems to be totally deserted. 'Forward!' it commands. Then, from the clear skies lightning strikes. Robert screams as he feels his body torn apart atom by atom. Then there is momentary blackness before the voice speaks again ...'Welcome to the realm of magic, Robert. We who live here call this realm Valoria. Just as we call his world Terra. My name is Garwayen, ruling Magister of the Wizard Council.' Garwayen will become Robert's Mentor. He brought him to Stonehenge and transported him to Valoria. Garwayen is growing old and his powers are beginning to wane. He needs a successor because the realm of magic is in grave danger.

A monstrous scheme is being prepared to conquer our world. The Wizard Council, which consists of Garwayen as Magister and the Lord Wizards of the Colleges of Magic, recently discovered a tiny rift between the world of Terra and their realm of magic. Garwayen voted for closing the rift so that our worlds would not come into conflict. The Lord Wizards voted for enlarging the rift. They have become jaded with their powers, and they believe they can conquer Terra. They must be stopped.

Facing the elements

Before Robert's instruction begins, he must select the elemental College of magic to which he will seal himself. There are four elemental Colleges - Earth, Air, Fire and Water. Each has unique strengths. Every Wizard must select an elemental College as his discipline in which he will become an adept. The four elemental Magic Colleges are mutually antagonistic to each other, and thus he can select only one. Each College possesses spells that can be created only by its adepts. Whichever college the player chooses, the wizard compliments Robert on his wise choice but there are differences in the Colleges that affect the successful strategy for each of them.

To make a magic spell, a wizard must combine mystical ingredients in the correct proportions and then say the correct magic word to activate the spell. There are five types of ingredients used in creating magic spells. The most important ingredient is Aspect, which defines the property of the spell. Each magic spell contains one type of Aspect ingredient. The other ingredients are

Designed by
Joe Ybarra

Published by
ASCII Entertainment Software, Inc.

Systems
PC

Graphics
EGA, VGA/MCGA

Supports
Roland, AdLib, Pro Audio Spectrum, SoundBlaster, SoundBlaster Pro, Pro Audio Spectrum, Thunder Board Mouse or keyboard

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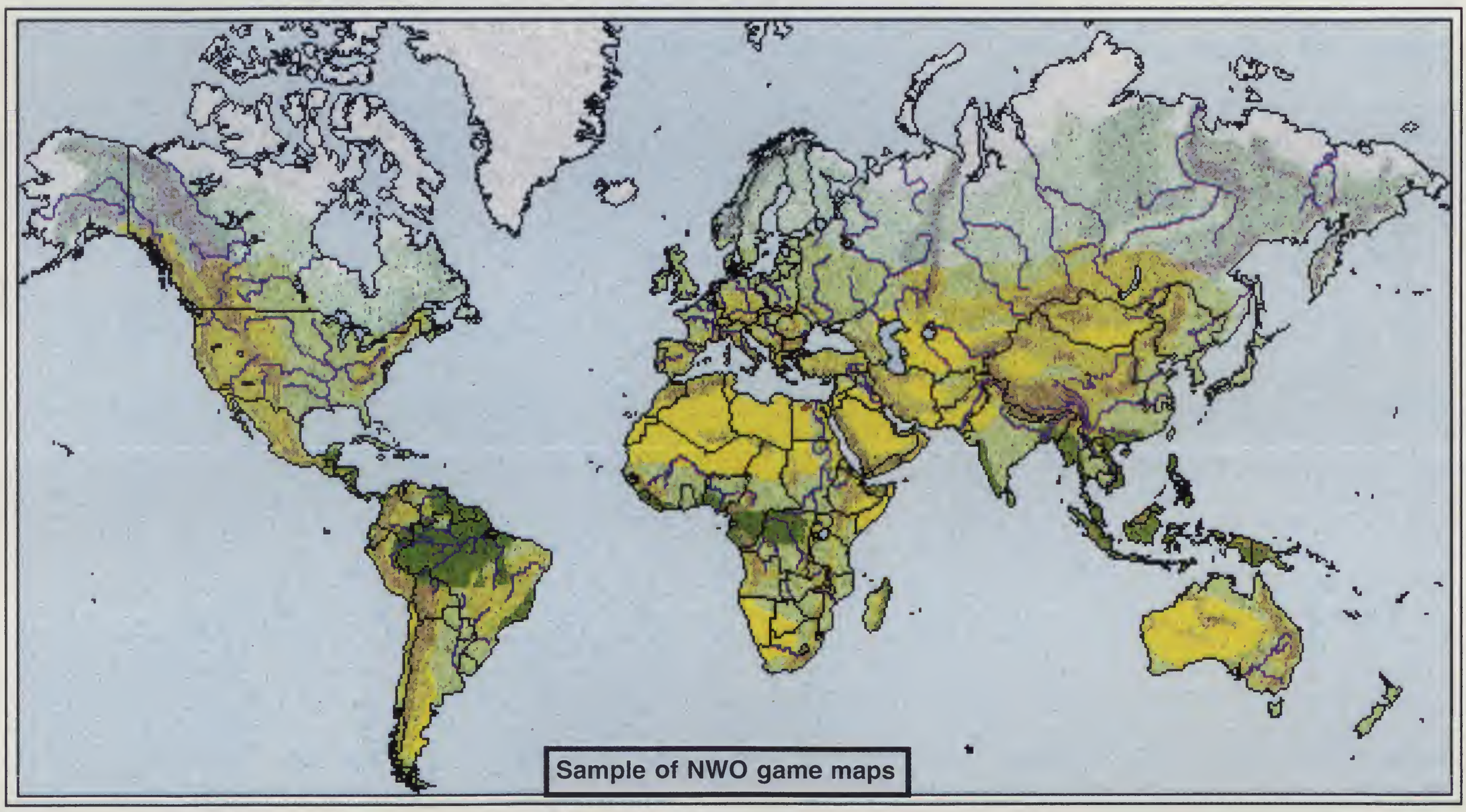

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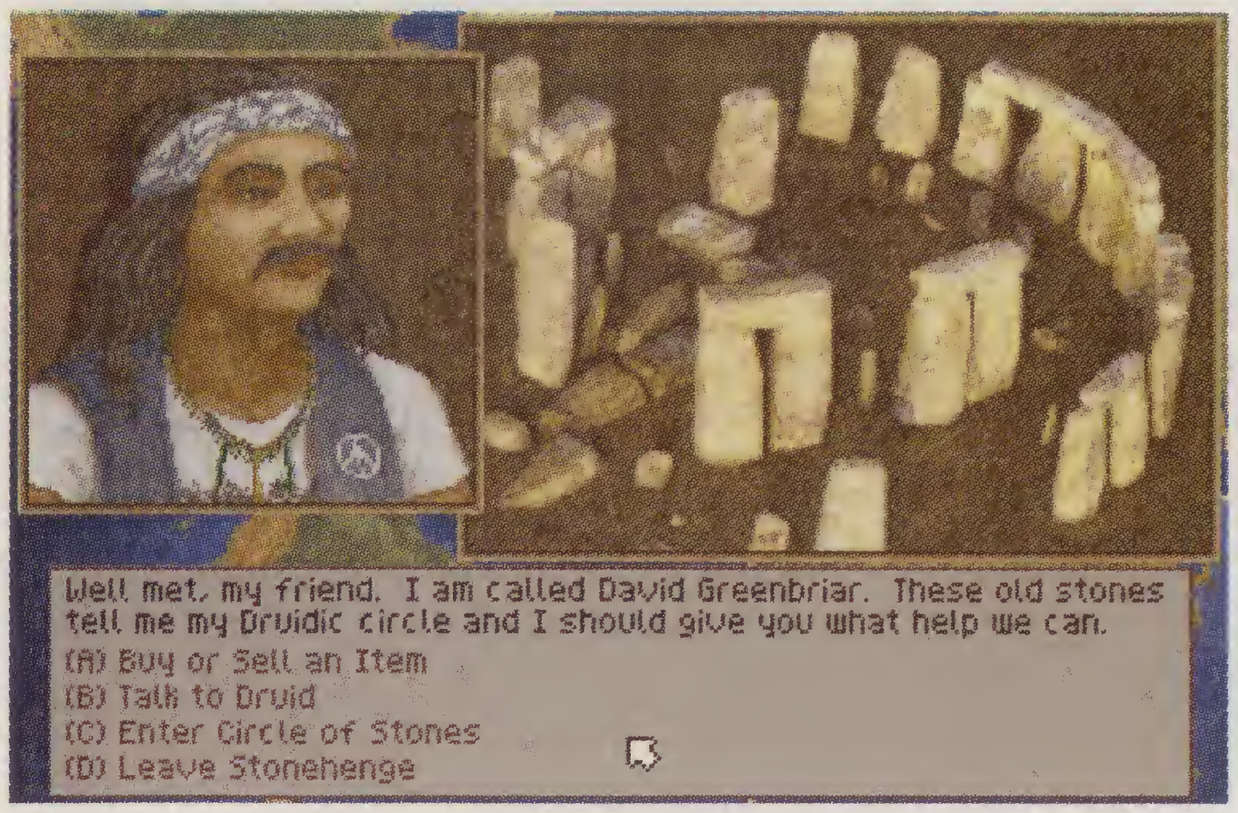


jewels, powders, candles and stones. These four ingredients are used in varying amounts in each magic spell. If the wizard has combined the ingredients correctly and said the appropriate magic word, a magic spell will result. If he combines the ingredients incorrectly, the spell can backfire unpleasantly. Once a spell is created, it is added to the wizard's spellbook and he can recreate the spell automatically if he has enough ingredients.

It's the real thing

A created spell can be modified by varying the quantities of the ingredients within certain limits. Exceeding these limits is as bad as getting the original recipe incorrect. Garwayen leads Robert through a tutorial to teach him a few spells and introduce him to physical combat with the Sword of Striking. Magic may weaken a wizard but the only way ultimately to defeat him is by attacking him with a hand weapon.

The magic realm of Valoria is divided into domains that are controlled by the Lord Wizards. Robert must enter the Lords' domains to combat them. And he will eventually have to leave their domains.

The Return Home spell allows him to exit a domain. It returns he to Garwayen's stone circle on Valoria. It belongs to the Ethereal Magic College and is known by every wizard. Casting magic uses the caster's life force. The more powerful the spell, the more life force he must expend. Any damage he sustains in combat will also drain his life force. If he expends all his life force, he will die. Life force is continually replenished. Avoiding combat and ceasing spellcasting spells will allow a wizard to regain his precious life energy. If his life force reaches a dangerously low level, Robert can use his Return Home spell to return to the safety of the stone circle.

There are two important spells he will learn when the time is ripe. The first, from the Ethereal college, reveals a map showing the locations of enemies lurking in the domain. The other, from the Earth College, reveals treasures hidden in the domain. Until he is ready to learn these spells, Garwayen will cast them for him before he enters a domain.

After defeating any opponent in combat, Robert should explore the domain thoroughly because there are many valuable items to be found. The first combat tutorial is set in the Earth domain. This is characterized by fields, trees, water and rocks with the occasional chasm to trap the unwary. A Fire wizard's first combat spell is Fireball. An Air wizard's first combat spell is Lightning. When all the opponents in a domain are defeated Robert does a little victory jump. It is now safe for him to explore the entire domain without further combat.

Formula one

Initially Garwayen tells Robert all the details that he needs to create spells but his information becomes more sketchy as Robert becomes more experienced. Once the tutorials are complete Robert travels to Terra to meet Garwayen's allies. The gateway between Valoria and Terra is Stonehenge. Once Robert is in his own world, he must use his own money to get around.

As the rift grows between the universes, more places become magically sensitive. The allies are drawn to these places. Robert is well advised to visit every place the map reveals and make contact with all the allies as they appear. The allies are students of the Mystic arts. They have pledged themselves to aid the Chosen One spoken of in the Oracle. The Oracle speaks of the Chosen One who will save the two universes. Garwayen believes that Robert may be the Chosen One.

The player has four sources of information about formulas and the ingredients required for spells. Studying the wisdom of the Great Sages who know magic in the manual is the first of these. 'Practice, practice, practice!' Alter the composition of his ingredients ... try new aspects, new words. Never stop learning! Magic is simple ... sort of!' is a verse from 'Listen To Me, Grasshopper!' Second, are the partial recipe sheets that contain some information on magic. The rest must be filled in from the other sources. Third - and perhaps most important - is frequent consultation of the allies in Terra. They have scraps of information that will help to determine the formulas and ingredients for spells. Finally, information about magic can often be found in the magic domains themselves. Many who have challenged the Lord Wizards carried notes about their magic into battle. These notes can still be found on occasion.

Dignity in labor

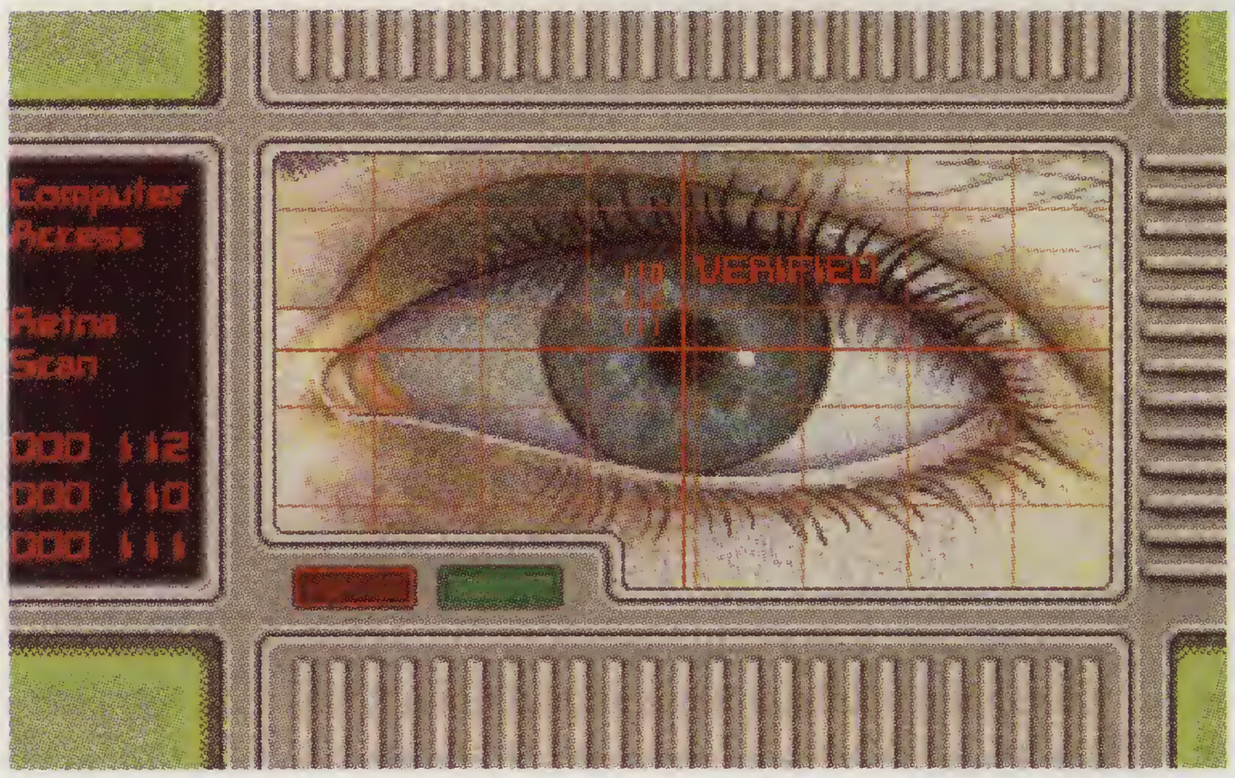
Once Robert's training is complete he hops between Terra and the domains of magic. The allies set him quests to find artefacts for which they exchange information. Whilst he is on Terra, Robert can trade spell ingredients to stock his workshop and, ultimately, he must develop a portfolio of spells with which to do battle with the evil Lords. When he defeats all the Lords he is worthy to succeed Garwayen and heal the rift between the universes.

Spellcraft is a game that grew on me slowly. The first few stages were a chore. I found the chasing around the domains knifing ghoulies and orcs whilst collecting chests and vials tiresome. Even the puzzle solving on Terra failed to capture my imagination at first. Then, without warning, I found myself being drawn back to the game repeatedly. I claimed that it was all part of my commitment to professional integrity. Research, I thought. But, in truth, **Spellcraft** is a clever, addictive game that mixes the best of adventures, logic puzzles and fantasy role-playing. ❑

Mantis

Pestilence in Pittsburgh

By Richard Lawrence



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Paragon Software

Published by
Microplay

Systems
PC

Graphics
256 color VGA

Supports
Most sound cards

Notes
A CD ROM version featuring additional speech and graphics will be released later next month

Long, long, ago, there was a game for the Amiga called **Warhead**. It was a polygon rendered space combat simulator, and featured realistic flight dynamics. It was a one disk game, under 800K in total size.

What would happen if someone took that game, grabbed a SoundBlaster and sampled a bunch of speech, used a frame grabber on a videotape of some character actors, and made 3-D renderings of some animations? According to Paragon Software, the end product is **Mantis**.

Making a fist of it

XF5700 Mantis Experimental Fighter, or **Mantis** for short, comes on eight 1.44 diskettes, and eats about 20 megabytes of disk space. The game revolves around Viper, a hot shot pilot from Pittsburgh (there are references to Pittsburgh throughout the game, even down to a plug for the Pittsburgh Penguins, which may have something to do with the fact the authors reside there). Viper is a member of F.O.E., Fist Of Earth, a worldwide combat force formed after the evil Sirians invaded and killed off most of the world population. The Sirians are an insect race that has a nasty habit of incubating inside humans and eating them after they hatch. This rather impolite behavior has caused the earth to declare war on them, and build the Mantis superfighter, a highly maneuverable machine that can carry a huge assortment of weapons. The Mantis is launched from Solbase, a large space station orbiting near earth.

The typical mission (the box claims there are over 100, but only 70 were needed to complete the game for this review, with 270 kills credited to Viper) involves three main phases: briefing, combat, and debriefing with a possible animation sequence.

Weapon philosophy

Briefing is basically a small animation of a commander waving a pointer around at a map saying 'There are aliens at point X, go and get them. Shoot straight, dismissed.' This formula held for about 90% of the missions played to reach the end of the game. There were a very few escort missions mixed in, but never as complicated or with clear goals beyond 'kill the bad guys' as in the **Wing Commander** series. There are no incidental dangers, like mine fields or asteroids.

After briefing there is a configuration screen for the ship that allows changes in armament. The basic philosophy here should be to carry as much high powered weaponry as possible. The default configuration has four Data Pods in it, but these are only used in about four missions with clear warning, so the best idea is to drop them and pick up as many nuclear missiles as the ship can carry. After this there are a couple of rendered animations of the ship launching and going into quad-jump (which gets the ship to the point of combat).

The heart of any game like this, as was true with the **Wing Commander** products, is the combat phase of the game. **Mantis** has some major differences here that many simulator pilots will have a hard time adjusting to. The most important thing is that **Mantis** is 'realistic' - that is, the space ship encounters no friction, so once thrust is applied the resulting velocity vector will remain constant until counteracted by another thrust. When fighting more than two enemies, it's nearly impossible for a human pilot to compensate for the multiple vectors incurred by thrusting for position, with the result of the typical player being completely lost after manually flying around for a few seconds. Fortunately, the designers programmed a complete set of autopilot modes into the game, which allow the player to compensate for this. The autopilot can turn towards the target, automatically pursue it, adjust relative zero (more on this later), face towards forward motion, face away from forward motion, and stop the ship relative to zero.

Less than zero

Without the relative zero option, combat would be extremely difficult. What this does basically is make the computer think that stopped means to go the same speed and direction as the current target. So to pursue a typical target, the pilot selects mode 5, adjust relative zero to target, then 9, stop the ship relative to zero, and then either 2 (turn and face the target) or 3 (automatically pursue the target).

Another feature that assists the pilot in visualization the speed and direction of the ship is a false starfield that is displayed when the ship is moving. When thrust is applied, a field of small green dots appears and rushes past the player. If the ship is going fast, the dots turn red and move faster themselves.

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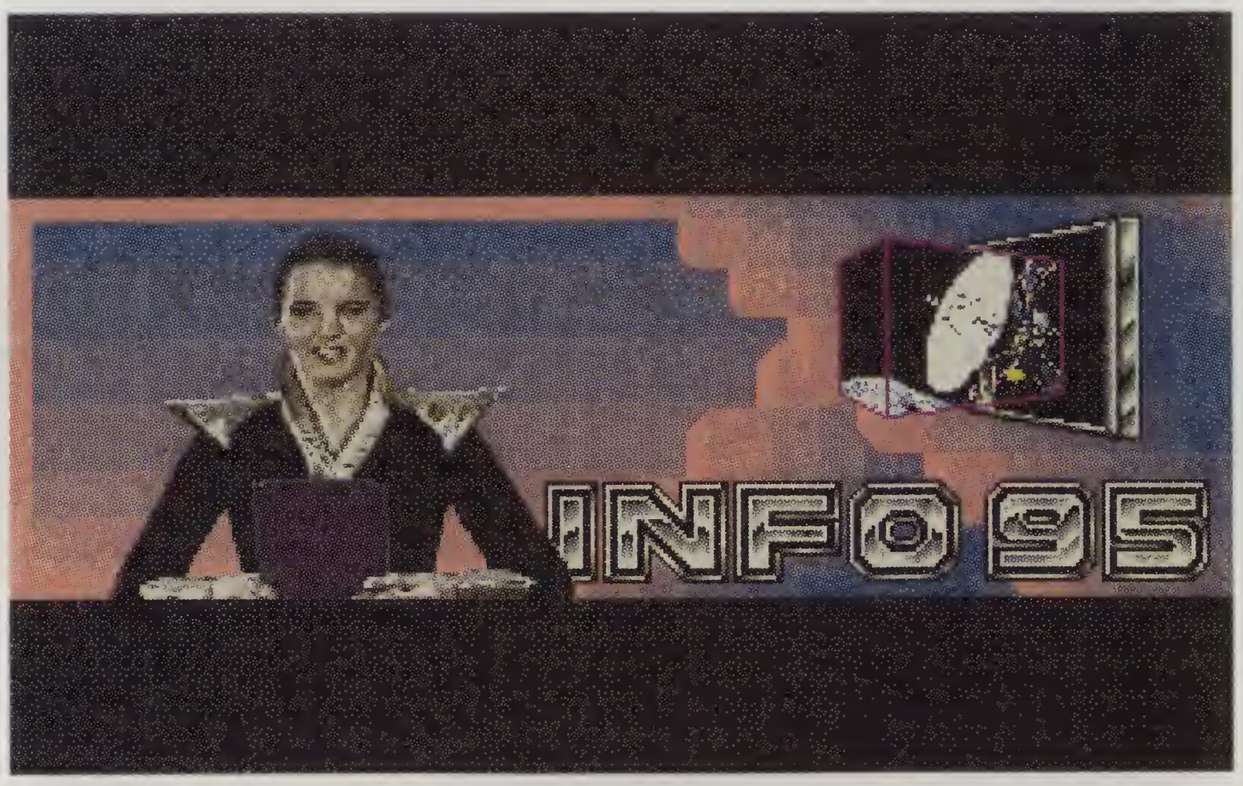

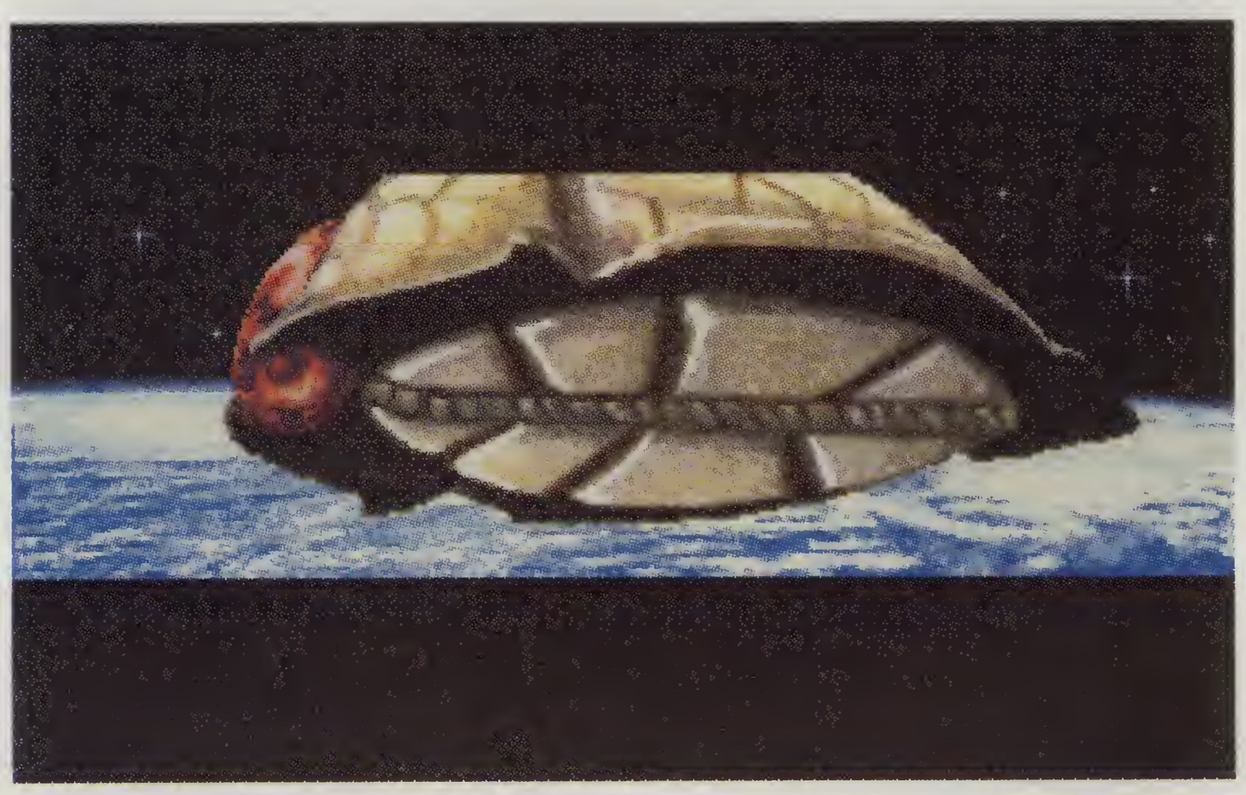

The speed, color, and direction of this field shows where the ship is facing relative to the current movement. For instance, if the dots where moving left to right across the screen, and were red, then the player would know that the ship was facing perpendicular to the direction of movement and that it was currently moving fast. This is a nice feature to compensate for the lack of a horizon, but would have been much better served by higher resolution display. At 320 by 200 the dots are large enough to be a distraction at times.

Combat moan

Graphics in combat are purely polygon rendered, as opposed to the bitmapped over polygon system used in **Wing Commander**. The **Wing Commander** system gives more variety in appearance, but the polygon system for **Mantis** is well done and is fast. On a 386/33Mhz system, slow down was never a problem even in later missions with 20 or more targets. The various cockpit displays can be turned on or off, and side/rear views are available. Information needed during combat is clearly indicated on the screen, and is easy to read and decipher even in the heat of battle, including the all important Missile Lock indicator, which shows how many missiles are currently tracking the Mantis.

Unfortunately, despite a good graphics engine and reasonable control ergonomics, combat just doesn't feel like combat in **Mantis**. The typical combat sequence is simply a series of autopilot commands issued in sequence, waiting for range to the target, and pressing enter to fire. During the 70 missions played for review, there were literally tens of missions successfully performed where no manual interaction was used besides running from missiles. If **Mantis** were a flight simulator, then all of the combat would be BVR (beyond visual range). Once the ship is close enough to actually see enemies and fire with guns, it is in the 'please hit me with a missile' range.

The Blue Squad, which Viper flies with most of the time, doesn't contribute much to combat. They like to use guns, which are highly ineffective in quick elimination of targets. Further, they simply never get killed, or get many kills themselves. The enemy seems to only target the player, never wingmen, even if the wingmen are currently pounding away at the space equivalent of an enemy aircraft carrier. All of these factors detract from the enjoyment of the combat sequence, and make it seem like control and interaction by the player is very minimal.

Going beserk

After combat is finished, the player is shown a screen that determines success of the mission, number of kills, number of kills by wingmen, and other statistics. After this screen may come one of the many animated sequences of the game. These were apparently digitized from a VCR badly in need of a head cleaning, as the images are extremely grainy. Further, the story lines presented often are not resolved during the course of the game or made no sense. Viper has a barmaid chasing after him, but also has his fiancee on board Solbase. No clues as to what eventually happens. At one point, the Blue Squad cussed Viper out for lack of performance, despite the fact he had more kills than the three of them combined! During one sequence, the player is shown Viper waking up at night, and a Sirian popping out of the back of some woman. Was this his fiancee? The barmaid? His mother? The game never tells.

If this is the 'plot' of **Mantis**, it falls far short. Characters are liberally borrowed from classic science fiction - for instance, an R2D2 type robot called ARMS, and worse, a direct copy of the giant robot killers from Fred Saberhagen's *Berserker* books (even called a 'Berserker' in the game!). Not to mention the fact the alien menace is a repackaged version from the *Alien* movies.

Mantis tries to do too much in too many directions at once. There is the basis for a solid combat game here, with some tweaks to make the player more important and interactive in his role. With better storyboarding some of the subplots may have played out well, but neither is currently the case. It is thus impossible to recommend a game that needs such improvement. **Mantis** was deleted from the hard drive directly after this review was finished. ❑

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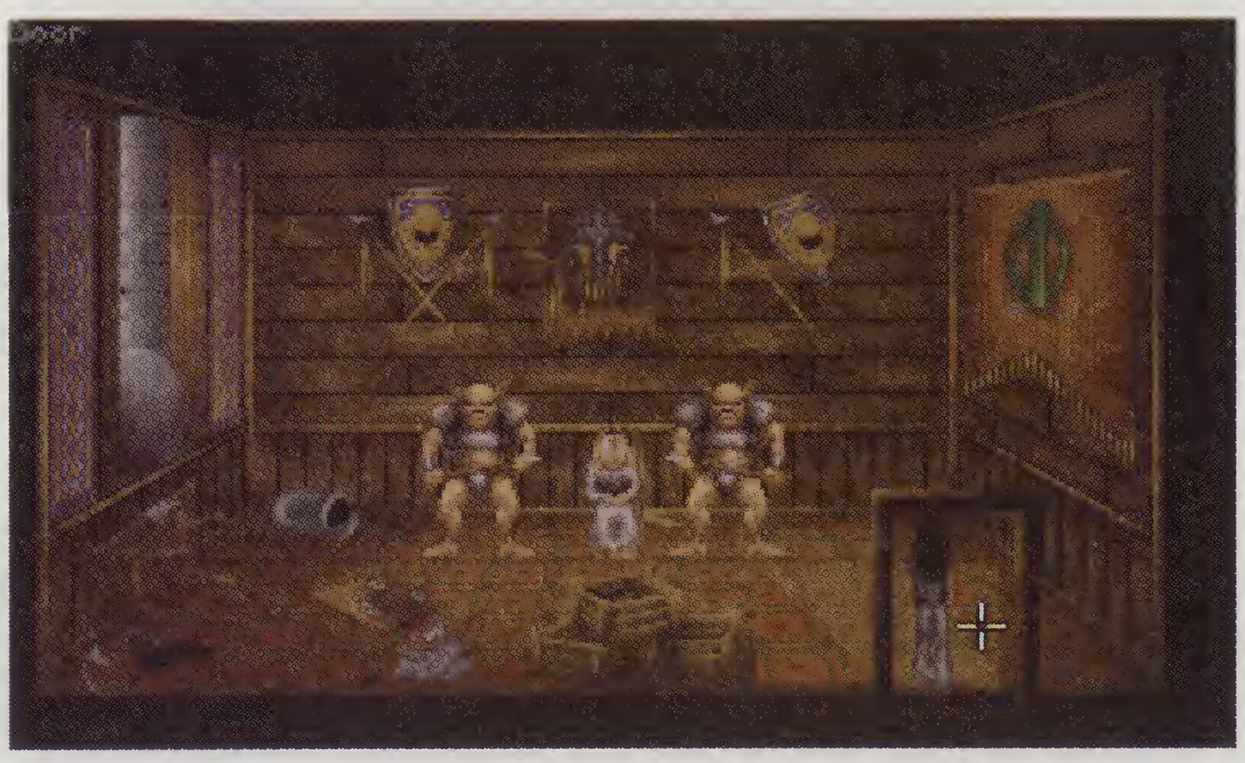
Reader Service No. 4

Lure of the Temptress

Diermot's tale

By Theo Clarke



Designed by
Dave Cummins

Developed by
Revolution Software

Published by
Virgin Games (UK)
Konami (US)

Systems
PC, Amiga and Atari

PC Graphics
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Notes
Thanks to Robert Williams for his help in completing this game

The Kingdom was at peace. After decades of unrest the King had united his quarrelsome subjects. Now, under his just rule, protected by the sea and the mountains, the people prospered and the crops flourished. The King and his companions had visited Diermot's village while hunting which gave the peasant a few day's easy pickings as a beater. Whilst there, the King learned of an uprising in the far off town of Turnvale.

A beautiful young enchantress named Selena had orchestrated a revolt. It all sounded very exciting but far too dangerous for Diermot. He saddled his pony and made haste to slip away unseen but the stupid beast had sensed the mounting tension and despite his protests he was soon with the King's guard. As dawn's cold fingers reached into the sky the King's army drew close to Turnvale. Through the morning mist they could hear the howls and bellows of the approaching army but it was not until their vague forms drew near that they realised that Selena had rallied an inhuman horde. It was Diermot's first encounter with the Skorl.

There, on a small hill above Turnvale, the King fell and was buried by those few companions who survived the battle. The town fell victim to Selena and the Skorl. Diermot was knocked unconscious when he fell from my terrified mount. He came to his senses a prisoner in Turnvale's squalid dungeons. **Lure of the Temptress** is Diermot's story.

Unfortunately the story starts with a stupid protection system typical of many UK games. The player has to enter the page numbers of two reproductions of sprites. The sprites are colored but the reproductions are small and monochrome.

There are thirty-three to choose from and many of them are similar. Not very similar, but close enough to muddle a tired player who has not appreciated the subtlety of the differences. Most game players appreciate the necessity for software protection but it need not be so complex. Fortunately, in this case the problem only arises at the beginning of each play session.

So, after a pleasant pictorial introduction with subtle imagery and delicate music, the player answers the protection puzzle and finds Diermot in his squalid cell. The first puzzle is how to escape from the cell, recruit an assistant and leave the dungeon.

Exploring Diermot's environment is simple. As the mouse pointer touches any interesting item, text appears at the top of the screen. Thus, in the rudimentary confines of the cell the only interesting elements are a door, a window, a torch, some straw and a crack in the wall. Clicking the left button yields a description of the current item. The right button presents a menu of interactions with the item. The menu is contextual. Diermot can *get* or *pull* the torch but he cannot drink it so only the two possible actions appear on the menu.

Outside the dungeons is the town of Turnvale. It is very small. There are fewer than a score of inhabitants and only twice that number of scenes. Despite this, the game does not feel cramped. Diermot wanders through the animated graphic adventure with his sidekick Ratpouch and can converse and trade with all the citizens that he meets. These citizens also wander around independently and hold conversations that do not involve Diermot himself. Ratpouch is particularly entertaining in his conversational gambits as he tries to persuade publicans to transgress the by-laws by selling alcohol to one of such tender years.

The characters are caricatures but they are sophisticated examples of their type. Gwyn the local gossip and the senile Catriona have long uninterruptible speeches once triggered whereas the sullen Morkus tends to taciturn abuse.

The puzzles are simple but varied and there are few circumstances that threaten Diermot's life. If the Skorl guard catches Diermot before he leaves the dungeons or if a Skorl finds him in the secured home of the vanished magician the game is over. He can alsodie in combat but these events are rare and avoidable. Most of the puzzles can be solved by talking to all the characters and giving them things. Saying the wrong things to some characters will make them unhelpful later but there are no dead ends arising from inappropriate gifts. Characters refuse to take things that they do not want or need. This makes it possible to solve most of the puzzles by methodically talking to everyone and giving each of them everything. This would only be a shortcoming if the puzzles were illogical but that is not the case here.

A few examples will serve to illustrate the logical flow of the puzzles. Diermot is given an artifact soon after he arrives in the town. The sign outside one of the establishments depicts the artifact and the proprietor will be delighted to receive it as a gift. Similarly, one of the characters has come to Turnvale to gain fortune by slaying a dragon but has abandoned the quest.

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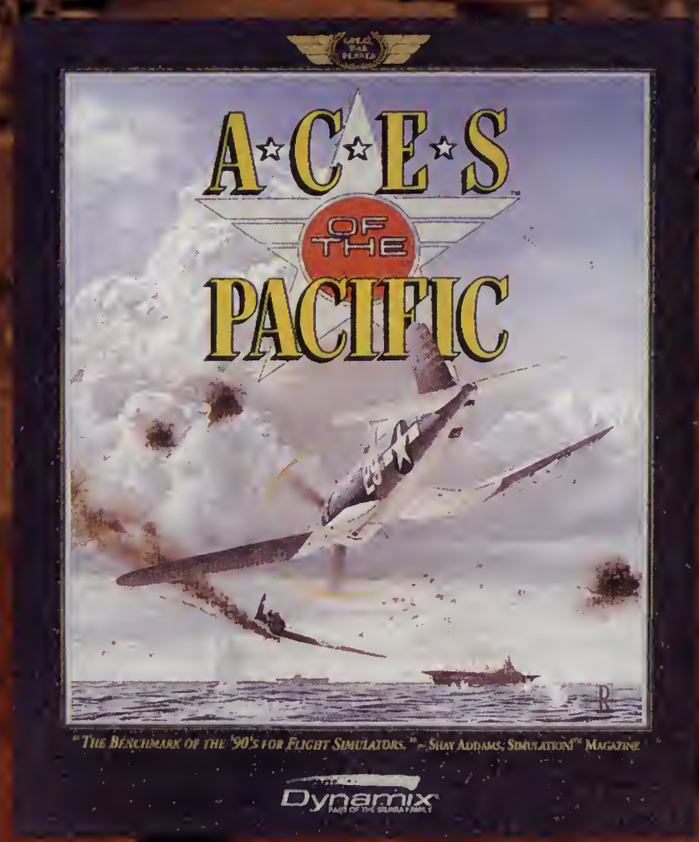

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"Aces of the Pacific is to Red Baron what the Corsair was to the Fokker Tri-Plane" Computer Gaming World.

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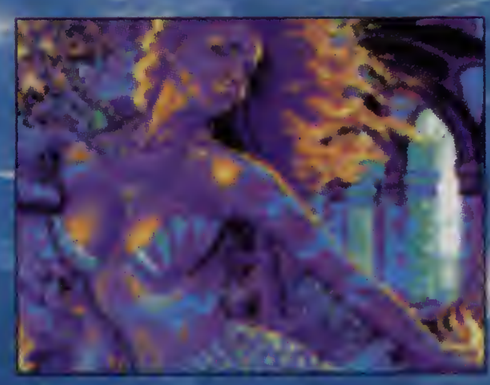

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When Diermot needs to enlist the dragon's aid this person is a useful source of information.

Part of the game's simplicity lies in the linear nature of the puzzles. Diermot must escape the dungeon. Then he must find the location of a missing maiden. Once her fate is known he must free her from captivity. The completion of each small quest opens up the clues for the next problem. This artifice allows the designers to limit the conversational gambits naturally. There are never more than four options for any speech by Diermot. This feels right, however, because neither he, nor the player, has many issues on their mind at any time.

Lure of the Temptress is small but almost perfectly formed. The sound track is simple but effective and the graphics are excellent. The sprites and the backgrounds show careful design and skillful rendering. The graphics use particularly effective variations of atmosphere. The dungeon looks dank. The village square feels central. The caves are menacing and the magician's abandoned house seems neglected. This manipulation of mood greatly enhances

the game. Similarly, the dialogue is convincingly well-observed and is only marred by a few unforgivable typographical errors.

The games shortcomings are very few. It would have been good to have had more music despite the effective sound effects. The greatest weakness, however, is the speed of transition between scenes. It is all very well showing a floppy disk icon or a clock whilst disk access or processing occurs but these should have been barely noticeable on the 33 MHz review machine with an accelerated graphics card and fast hard disk. It is hard to imagine what could have been causing the delay but even these interruptions were not sufficient to mar my pleasure significantly. Experienced adventurers may find the puzzles insufficiently demanding but the game stalled me a few times. ❑

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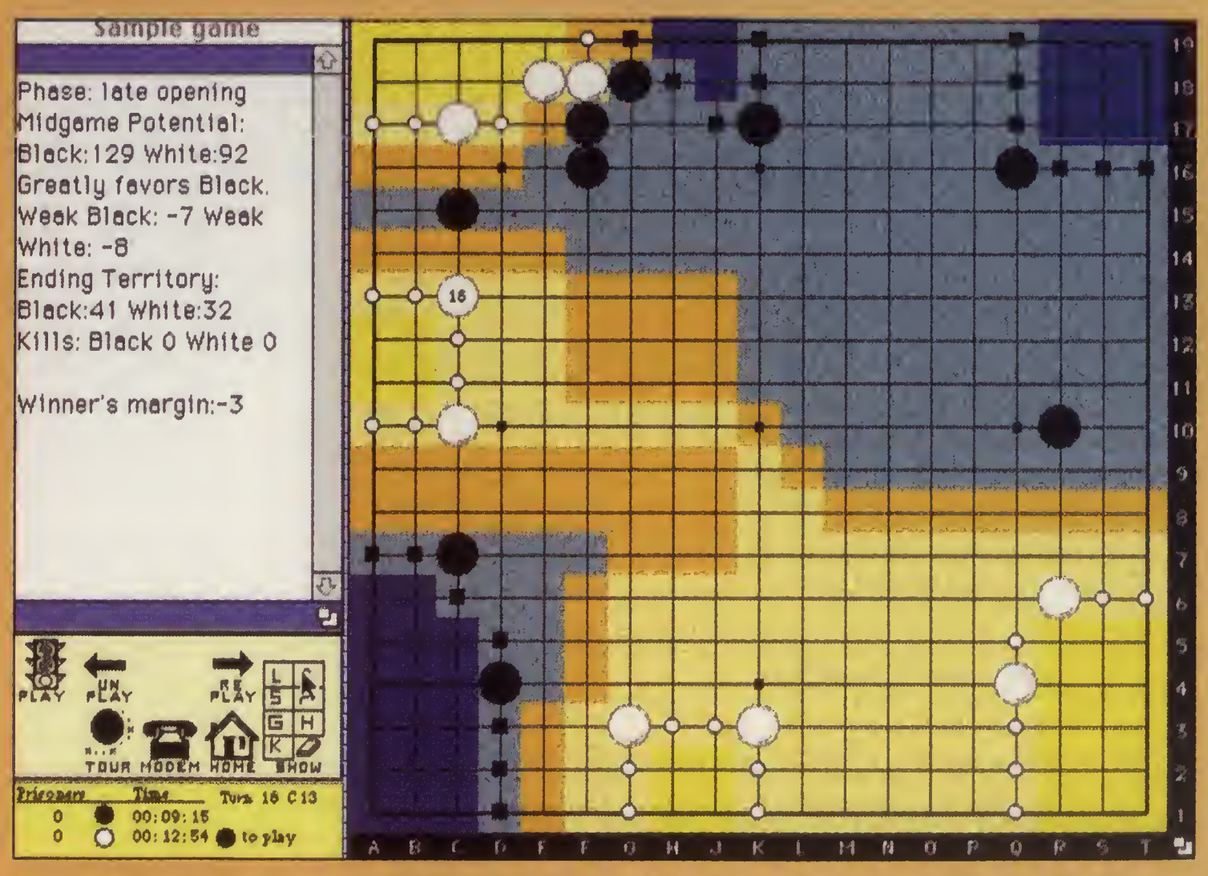
GO is played by two oponents who alternate play black or white stones on the vacant intersections of a grid attempting to surround empty points while also thwarting one another.

Whoever incloses more vacant intersections at the end of the game, wins.



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Reader Service No. 66

BLOCK BUSTERS

Forge of Virtue: Add-on disk for use with Origin's Ultima VII

It seems that a mysterious island has been raised from the depths by a slightly quacky mage named Erethian. The island is none other than the one sunken during one of the earlier installments of the Ultima series. And, most ominously, there is a dark presence gathering on the island, which must, according to Erethian, be subdued forever.

The Island (really three islands) is located south-southeast of Brittain. On the main island, there is a castle where Erethian can be found. Talking to him will get the quest underway. The player should also examine the cracked mirror, and the three grand statues in the northern hall. The player will discover that to accomplish the task of ridding the world of that old enemy, Exodus, three tests must be completed.

Test of truth

The first Test, the Test of Truth, can be entered by talking to the northernmost statue. The maze that the player is transported to is not large, but is full of false passages and tricks. The solution can be found by following the corridor until reaching the large main chamber, and probing the northern wall for a secret passage leading north. There one will find the Amulet of Truth, and will be whisked back to the statue for an increase in attributes.

Test of love

Double clicking on the northeastern wall of Erethians chamber opens up the passage to the Test of Love moongate. After being transported, one will find two stone golems, one of whom has been smashed.

After speaking with the living golem, the gather two buckets and a pick and obtain the books from the cottage for they will be needed later.

To find the Tree of Life the golem spoke of, the northern dungeon needs to be entered. Following this around, one will emerge into a clearing where a backpack lies. Stepping into this clearing will transport one to the dungeon that leads to the Tree of Life.

At the tree, place the first bucket at the southeastern foot of the rock, then 'use' the pick on the tree, not on the rock. Then gathering up the first bucket and replacing it with the second, the procedure will be complete. Returning to the Golems, the books will outline what must be done to breathe life into the dead Golem.

After obtaining the heart and spilling the blood on the rocks (as outlined in the book), double click on the dead Golem and put the heart into the 'body' box. Then, using the scroll that fell out of the books, the dead Golem will be restored.

However, it seems that the restored Golem is not happy about his brother sacrificing his heart to give him life, and asks help in bringing him back from the dead. So returning to the Tree of Life again and striking it with the pick, the player gets a Heart to give to the Golem. Repeating the ritual of blood and using the scroll will complete the test (the golems must be talked to after restoring them to gain the amulet of Love).

Test of courage

The final test involves the only significant dungeon in the entire quest, but is not very complex compared to the dungeons located elsewhere in Brittania.

Go through the dungeon until the two helmets set atop pedestals are reached. Switching these helmets will cause a secret passageway to open, where a fierce dragon can be found. The dragon must be fought, however, and the gem gained from it's mouth.

Returning to the castle (it makes sense to cast a 'mark' spell here to avoid having to return through the entire dungeon) and talking to the demon in the mirror and Erethian will enable one to construct a sword to house the gem. The sword must be heated by using the bellows many times, struck with the hammer on the anvil several times, an immersed into the water. Then, having captured the demon into the gem and placing the gem on the sword, the player can return to the dragon, and use the magic sword to slay him. Gaining the Amulet of Courage, the Test is complete.

Finally, all that remains to vanquish that old ArchEnemy is to destroy the Dark Core, and send Exodus to the fiery abyss. ❑

Doug Jacoby

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Quest for Glory III

The Wages of War

By Joseph Boone

Quest for Glory III, the Wages **of War** is a fairly typical Sierra game in most respects. The **Quest for Glory** series sets itself apart from other Sierra adventures by adding some elements of traditional CPRG's but the overall look and feel of the gaming experience isn't changed too drastically. The good news is that a typical Sierra game is not exactly a lousy product and each new game seems to hold some small new advance over the last.

Life with the lions

The story begins where **Quest for Glory II, Trial by Fire** left off. Our hero has little time to rest on his laurels and quickly gains a new mission after returning with Rakeesh, the liontaur, to the city of Tarna. A war is brewing between two human tribes and Rakeesh wants to end it before it can even begin. Without giving too much away, it soon becomes obvious that the two tribes are being manipulated into war and the real enemy must be revealed and thwarted for peace to prevail. This will involve travel to exotic sights, plunging fearlessly into danger, using brains as well as brawn, and more.

Playing the role

The setting for this adventure is a mythical land somewhat akin to Africa. The world is populated by a number of interesting characters, many of which will have useful information or items to offer. The city of Tarna boasts a level of civilization similar to ancient Egypt complete with a trading bazaar and an inn.

In contrast is a nearby village complete with spear throwing warriors and a more primitive lifestyle. In both places honor is important, however, and the inhabitants share a nobility of spirit that helps one believe that they have more in common than outward appearances might otherwise indicate. Conversation is an important portion of the game and the fact that so many characters are both likeable and interesting helps a great deal.

Talking heads

While **Quest for Glory III** has a heavy dose of adventure game in its format, we should not overlook the fact that it also contains plenty of RPG elements as well. The character development system allows for a choice between one of three professions; fighter, mage, or thief. The player can then decide to allocate a limited number of points to various skills. Better still, these different skills and professions allow players to take different approaches to game situations instead of forcing all comers to perform the same actions in the same way. This allows a degree of individuality in style of play that is not seen often enough in RPG's or adventure games.

If **Quest for Glory III** has a weakness, it is the combat. While not awful, it is also not particularly engaging. The

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Corey Cole

Published by
Sierra On line

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PC

Graphics
VGA

Supports
Most soundcards, Mouse

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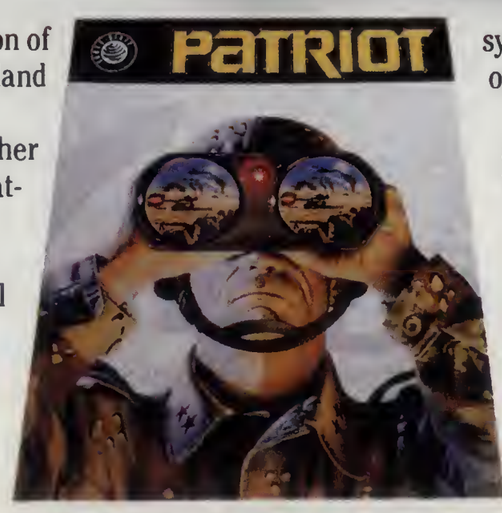

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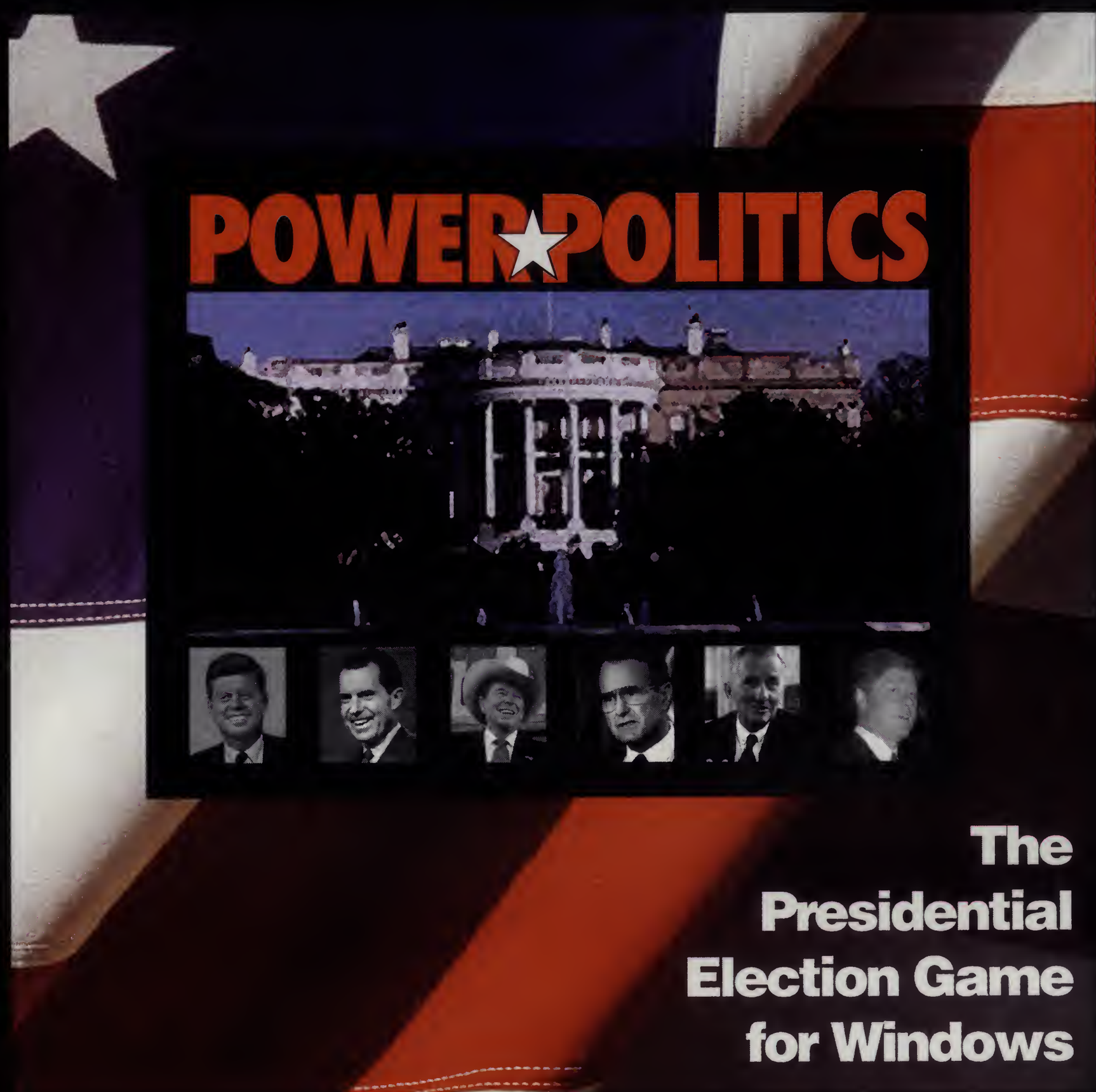

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Reader Service No. 42

available options are few and I just never felt drawn into the conflicts. Fortunately, fighting is not the prime method of progressing through the game but is just one element. While the combat system doesn't add much it is not prominent enough, nor bad enough, to be a serious detriment to the game as a whole.

The most obvious improvement in **Quest for Glory III** is in the graphic presentation. The clay modeling animation first seen in the VGA re-make of the original **Quest for Glory** is used again but the technology is utilized to better effect this time.

The talking heads that appear during conversations are incredibly lifelike. Without using digitized photographs it is hard to imagine a much more realistic or appealing image. In addition to the amazing character portraits we continue to see background paintings that are as good as anything on the market and better than most.

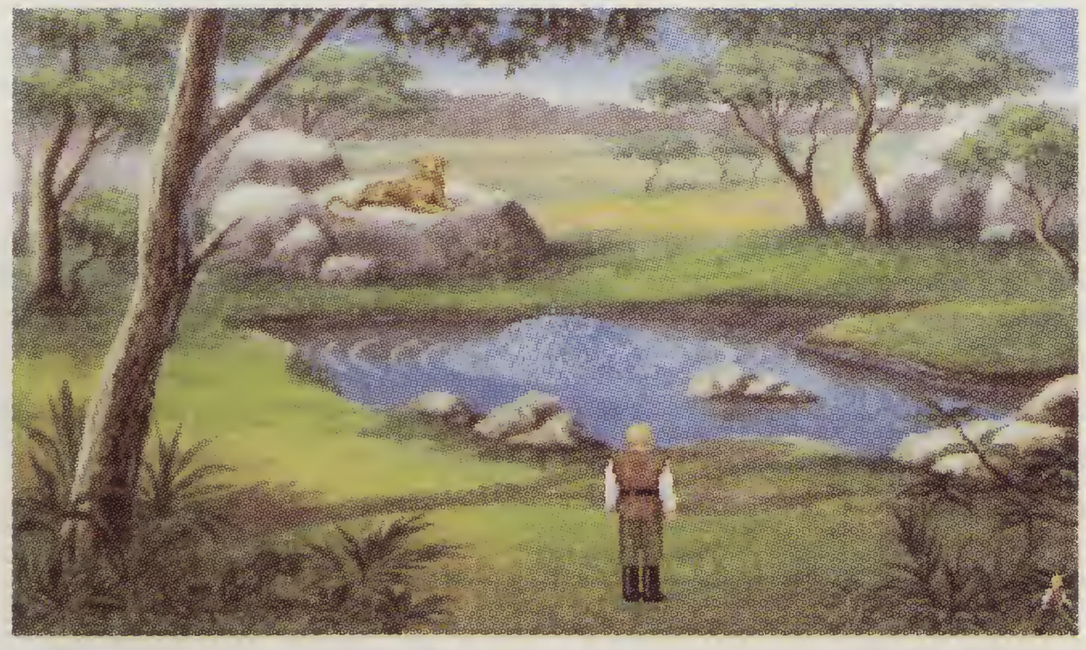
The soundtrack does an excellent job of setting the mood for each scene without ever becoming intrusive. Perhaps the highest praise I can offer is that I occasionally find myself humming one of the ditties from the game. When a melody can latch onto my psyche like that then it has certainly proved its appeal to me. The sound effects are also of superior quality.

Sound sense

One could almost get bored talking about games from Sierra On-Line. The company consistently produces games that are relatively bug-free, boast outstanding graphics, unequaled audio, strong characters, and the ever present point-and-click interface. The only real question to ask when trying to decide whether or not to buy this product is if this type of RPG in adventure clothing will appeal.

Hard core RPG fans who love hack and slash with lots of mapping should look elsewhere.

For those who enjoy solving the puzzles of adventure games but are also looking for a bit of combat and a system that allows true character development, the game will be appear more attractive. The wages of war offer rich dividends indeed. ❑



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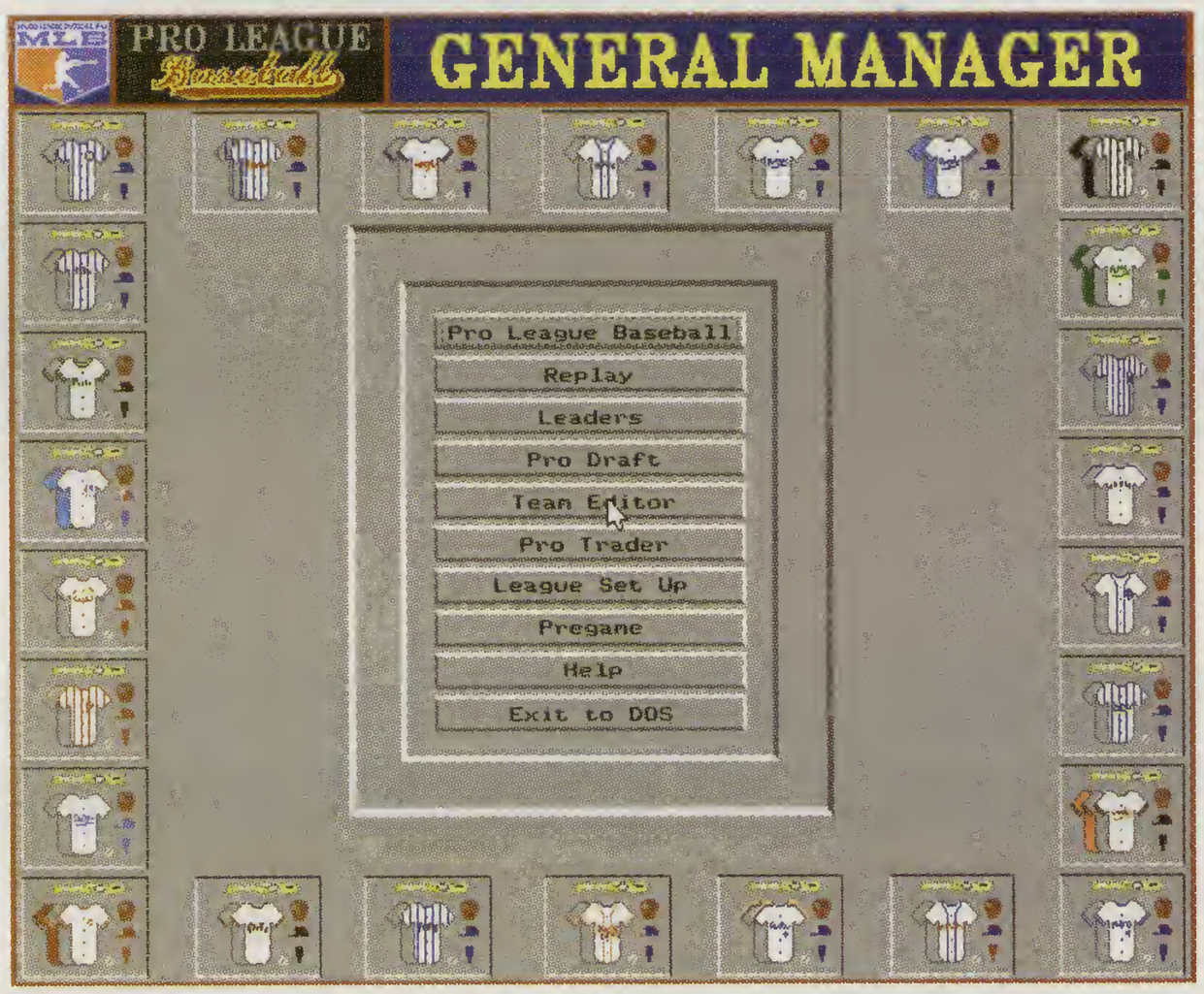
Reader Service No. 74

Pro League Baseball

Type blast

By Joseph McCullough



Designed by
Dave Holt, Jeff Holt, Alan Stephenson

Published By
Micro Sports, Inc.

Graphics
VGA, EGA

Supports
Modem play, all major sound cards, mouse

Players
1-2

Note
Review based on version 1.1. Owners of version 1.0 can send their master disks to the address printed in the manual to receive the latest version.

Ground-breaking. Sure it's a cliché, but the word fits Dave Holt and Micro Sports like a well-worn mitt. **Pro League Football** and **All-American College Football**, both released last year, became the first football simulations to offer true modem play capabilities. Since their release, the folks at Micro Sports have been focusing their energies on transferring their modem-play expertise into different arenas. The result — **Pro League Baseball**; a capable baseball simulation that will appeal to those who value matching wits with a human over out-smarting a machine.

Pro League Baseball was designed from the start to be a modem game. In fact, Holt says that close to 25% of the game's code is devoted to telecommunications. The effort shows. Those familiar with the company's football games will be pleasantly surprised at the level of detail underlying the game's modem play features. The game includes a dialing directory, upload and download capabilities (using Ymodem protocol), and the best chat mode I've seen in any computer game.

Chat line

Typing is almost always active, so comments and snide remarks can be traded at will. In addition, the game uses a different-colored font for the opponent's remarks. This small detail does wonders for comprehension, as anyone who has ever been involved in an online conference can attest.

As with **Pro League Football**, two types of modem play are supported: head-up and what Micro Sports calls 'online' mode. Head-up modem games are full nine-inning games played against a human opponent. Each player sets the roster, the pitcher, and then makes all managerial decisions during the game. Online mode is less complex, and is designed to work in conjunction with leagues run via online information services. In this mode, the player acts as a general manager. He drafts his team using the game's excellent Pro Draft module. He then can trade players using Pro Trader. Once the league's commissioner has set the schedule, he asks for team rosters and pitching rotations for a set number of games. The player uploads these files to the commissioner, and he replays the games using **Pro League Baseball**'s Replay module.

Power schedule

There is no 'game plan' logic as in **Pro League Football**. That is, the player does not prepare for each game by filling out a manager profile form. To do so for every game in a 162-game season would be madness. There is, however, the alternative of picking up at any point on the schedule and playing league games in head-up mode. This option can add excitement to the league once the end of the schedule rolls around.

In addition to leagues formed via information services, leagues can also be created and executed using head-up play. The game's League Set-up utility allows players to design a league with as few as two teams or as many as 26. Also, the schedule maker is flexible enough to allow each team to play another a minimum of twice or a maximum of 14 times. With this kind of power, a small group of friends can easily set up a short season and play all games in head-up mode.

All stats for league games are tracked, and can be easily viewed using the Leaders module. Fourteen hitting statistics, 12 fielding categories, and fourteen pitching breakdowns can be viewed or printed. Team stats, league stats, and league standing are also available.

It is quite evident that the depth of stats reporting available in **Pro League Baseball** rivals the best add-on disks available for other baseball simulations. What's more, the game also offers Pro Draft and Pro Trader modules to round out the package. The draft program allows the player to select the teams included in the draft, choose either a descending or rotational draft order, set

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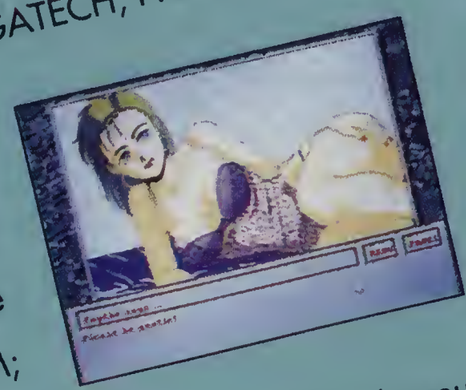

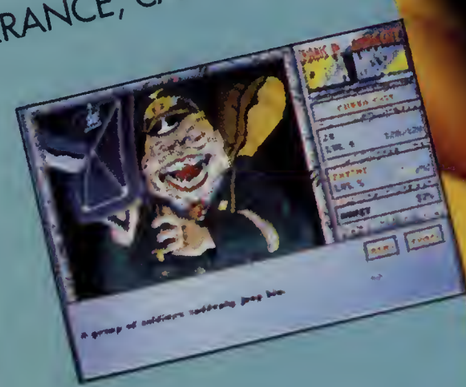

ACTUAL VGA SCREEN IMAGES

System requirements: 286 or faster machine with 640K RAM; hard disk with min. 12 megabytes of available space required, mouse recommended. Graphics compatible with EGA, MCGA and VGA (VGA highly recommended). **Sound support:** Sound Blaster Pro, Adlib Gold

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R RATED R (This program is voluntarily rated due to the partially violent and adult nature of the graphic imagery.) This program is intended for mature audiences only!!! No sales to minor under 18 and where prohibited by law.

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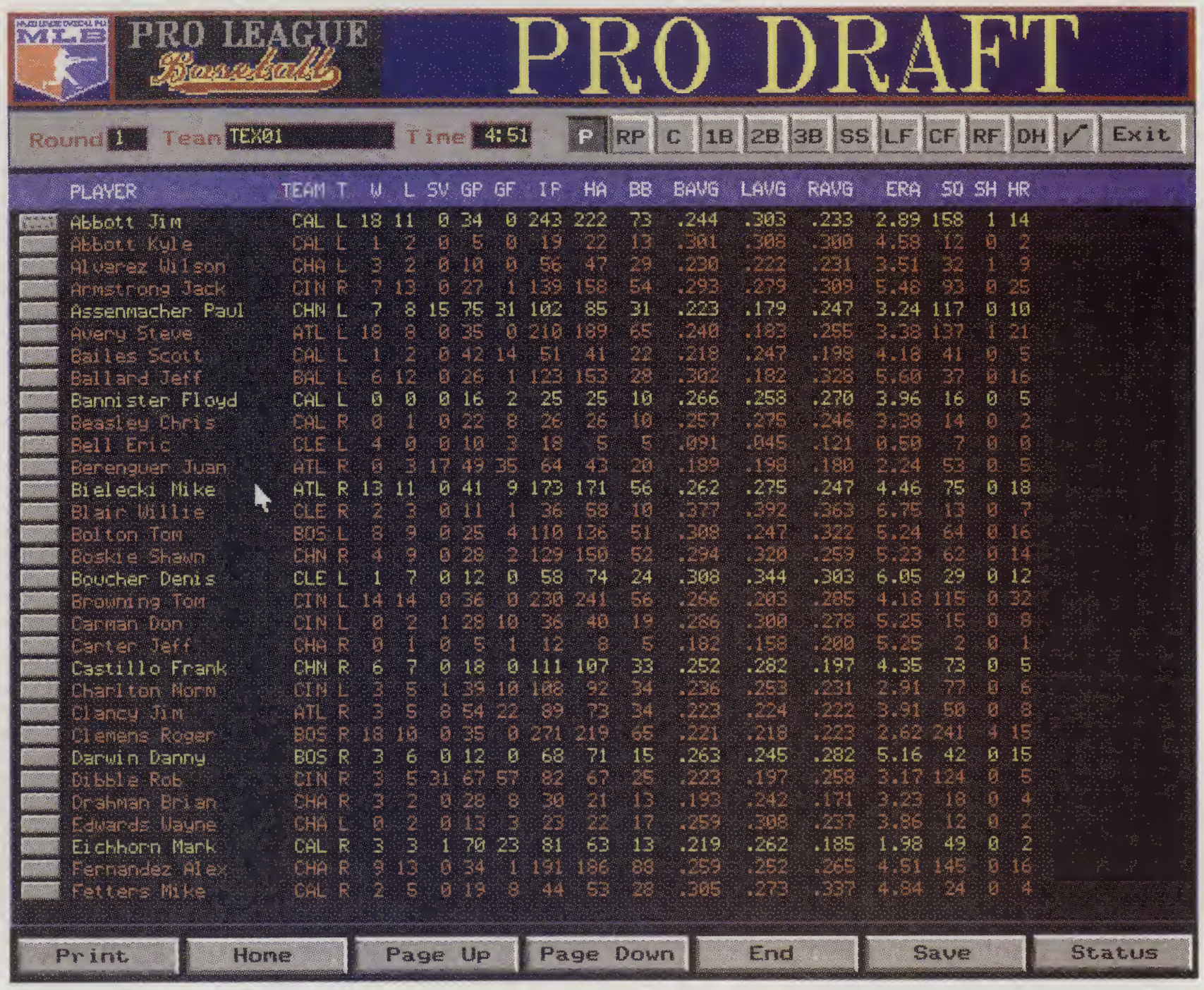

PLAYER	TEAM	T	W	L	SV	GP	GF	IP	HA	BB	BAVG	LAVG	RAVG	ERA	SO	SH	HR
Abbott Jim	CAL	L	18	11	0	34	0	243	222	73	.244	.303	.233	2.89	158	1	14
Abbott Kyle	CAL	L	1	2	0	5	0	19	22	13	.301	.308	.300	4.58	12	0	2
Alvarez Wilson	CHA	L	3	2	0	10	0	56	47	29	.230	.222	.231	3.51	32	1	9
Armstrong Jack	CIN	R	7	13	0	27	1	139	158	54	.293	.279	.309	5.48	93	0	25
Assenmacher Paul	CHN	L	7	8	15	75	31	102	85	31	.223	.179	.247	3.24	117	0	10
Avery Steve	ATL	L	18	8	0	35	0	210	189	65	.240	.183	.255	3.38	137	1	21
Bailes Scott	CAL	L	1	2	0	42	14	51	41	22	.218	.247	.198	4.18	41	0	5
Ballard Jeff	BAL	L	6	12	0	26	1	123	153	28	.302	.182	.328	5.60	37	0	16
Bannister Floyd	CAL	L	0	0	0	16	2	25	25	10	.266	.258	.270	3.96	16	0	5
Beasley Chris	CAL	R	0	1	0	22	8	26	26	10	.257	.275	.246	3.38	14	0	2
Bell Eric	CLE	L	4	0	0	10	3	18	5	5	.091	.045	.121	0.50	7	0	0
Berenguer Juan	ATL	R	0	3	17	49	35	64	43	20	.189	.198	.180	2.24	53	0	5
Bielecki Mike	ATL	R	13	11	0	41	9	173	171	56	.262	.275	.247	4.46	75	0	18
Blair Willie	CLE	R	2	3	0	11	1	36	58	10	.377	.392	.363	6.75	13	0	7
Bolton Tom	BOS	L	8	9	0	25	4	110	126	51	.308	.247	.322	5.24	64	0	16
Boskie Shawn	CHN	R	4	9	0	28	2	129	150	52	.294	.320	.259	5.23	62	0	14
Boucher Denis	CLE	L	1	7	0	12	0	58	74	24	.308	.344	.303	6.05	29	0	12
Browning Tom	CIN	L	14	14	0	36	0	230	241	56	.266	.203	.285	4.18	115	0	32
Carman Don	CIN	L	0	2	1	28	10	36	40	19	.286	.300	.278	5.25	15	0	8
Carter Jeff	CHA	R	0	1	0	5	1	12	8	5	.182	.158	.200	5.25	2	0	1
Castillo Frank	CHN	R	6	7	0	18	0	111	107	33	.252	.282	.197	4.35	73	0	5
Charlton Norm	CIN	L	3	5	1	39	10	108	92	34	.236	.253	.231	2.91	77	0	6
Clancy Jim	ATL	R	3	5	8	54	22	89	73	34	.223	.224	.222	3.91	50	0	8
Clemens Roger	BOS	R	18	10	0	35	0	271	219	65	.221	.218	.223	2.62	241	4	15
Darwin Danny	BOS	R	3	6	0	12	0	68	71	15	.263	.245	.282	5.16	42	0	15
Dibble Rob	CIN	R	3	5	31	67	57	82	67	25	.223	.197	.258	3.17	124	0	5
Drahman Brian	CHA	R	3	2	0	28	8	30	21	13	.193	.242	.171	3.23	18	0	4
Edwards Wayne	CHA	L	0	2	0	13	3	23	22	17	.259	.308	.237	3.86	12	0	2
Eichhorn Mark	CAL	R	3	3	1	70	23	81	63	13	.219	.262	.185	1.98	49	0	2
Fernandez Alex	CHA	R	9	13	0	34	1	191	186	88	.259	.252	.265	4.51	145	0	16
Fetters Mike	CAL	R	2	5	0	19	8	44	53	28	.305	.273	.337	4.84	24	0	4

a limit on the time allowed for each pick, and choose how many rounds the draft will be.

Pro Trader supports the traditional one-for-one trade, but it also allows any manager to negotiate trades involving more than two players. For example, San Francisco drafts both Eric Davis and Darryl Strawberry, both sensational hitters and fielders. Unfortunately, they fail to draft a good group of closing pitchers. The manager could trade Davis for two or three pitchers, giving up a superstar but obtaining much-needed pitching.

Blast off

With such fantastic utilities and modem play to boot, the actual game module must be a knock-out, right? Well, let's call it a qualified 'yes.' When playing via modem, or for that matter, when playing a friend on the same computer, the game is a blast. Playing against the computer, however, leaves one feeling a bit underwhelmed. The problem lies in the lack of play selection. Most strategy-only simulations inundate the player with strategic decisions. **Micro League Baseball 4.0**, for example, allows the player to create a custom play-book with up to 99 plays. Compared to that, **Pro League Baseball**'s array of strategic decisions is spartan at best.

On offense, the player must first choose how to bat. Batting strategy includes Hit Away, Steal (if a runner is on base), Hit and Run (also requires a base runner), and Bunt. Missing are choices for squeeze bunt and sacrifice.

Next, the player must decide what pitch to anticipate. The more accurate the prediction, the better the chance for a hit. Computer pitchers have tendencies which a careful eye can discern. Had this not been implemented, trying to predict a computer player's next pitch would be an exercise in futility.

The final category on offense is base running. This can be either conservative, normal, or aggressive. Aggressive running means the base-runners will always try for the extra base, so use with caution. In all, the offensive strategy is adequate, but there are times in the game, for example, when a sacrifice fly is desperately needed. Pro League Baseball offers the player no way to make this call.

Defensive strategy is also missing some key plays. The player can move the outfield in, but not out. What's more, there is no way to shift the fielders left or right to compensate for pull hitters. Nor is there an infield choice for double-play depth.

Of course this could all be academic. The game's logic probably makes internal adjustments to compensate for any game situations. But shouldn't the aim of an interactive computer game be to suspend reality; to give the player a feeling of control? **Pro League Baseball** comes up a bit short on this count.

Modem meltdown

The unique thing about this game, though, is that these concerns seem to melt away when playing via modem. The thrill of human competition more than compensates for any perceived lack of strategy. Some have argued, in fact, that any more strategy would cause long delays that would bog down the game. This further underscores the observation that **Pro League Baseball** is first and foremost a modem play vehicle. It includes a computer opponent, but that was not how the game was intended to be played.

No review would be complete without a word about the game's sound and graphics. Micro Sports has done a credible job on both counts. It's no **Hardball III**, but **Pro League Baseball** offers a considerable amount of flash for a strategy game. The majority of the screen includes a realistic (although small-scale) mock up of the home team's park. Animation in the park is almost too small to be useful, but it is supplemented by a simulated full-motion video screen which replays the previous play in great detail. In addition, those with sound cards can hear digitized commentary describing the play. The menu system and overall game interface is complex, due mainly in part to the small font used on some of the screens. Any feelings of confusion, though, wear away with familiarity.

Pro League Baseball is a full-featured simulation which finally brings true modem play to the ball park, and that fact alone puts it in a class by itself. But even without the modem play capabilities, the game measures up feature by feature to all but the toughest competition. Those who don't own modems, or who enjoy out-foxing a computer just as much as a person, will enjoy one of the more full-featured strategy games on the market. For the rest of us, though, **Pro League Baseball** is the game we've been waiting for. ❑

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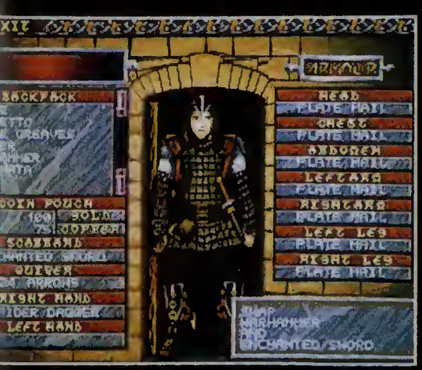

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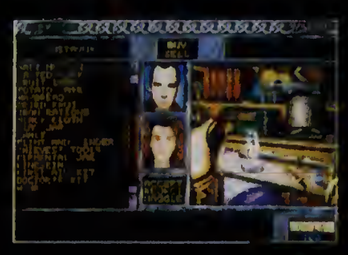

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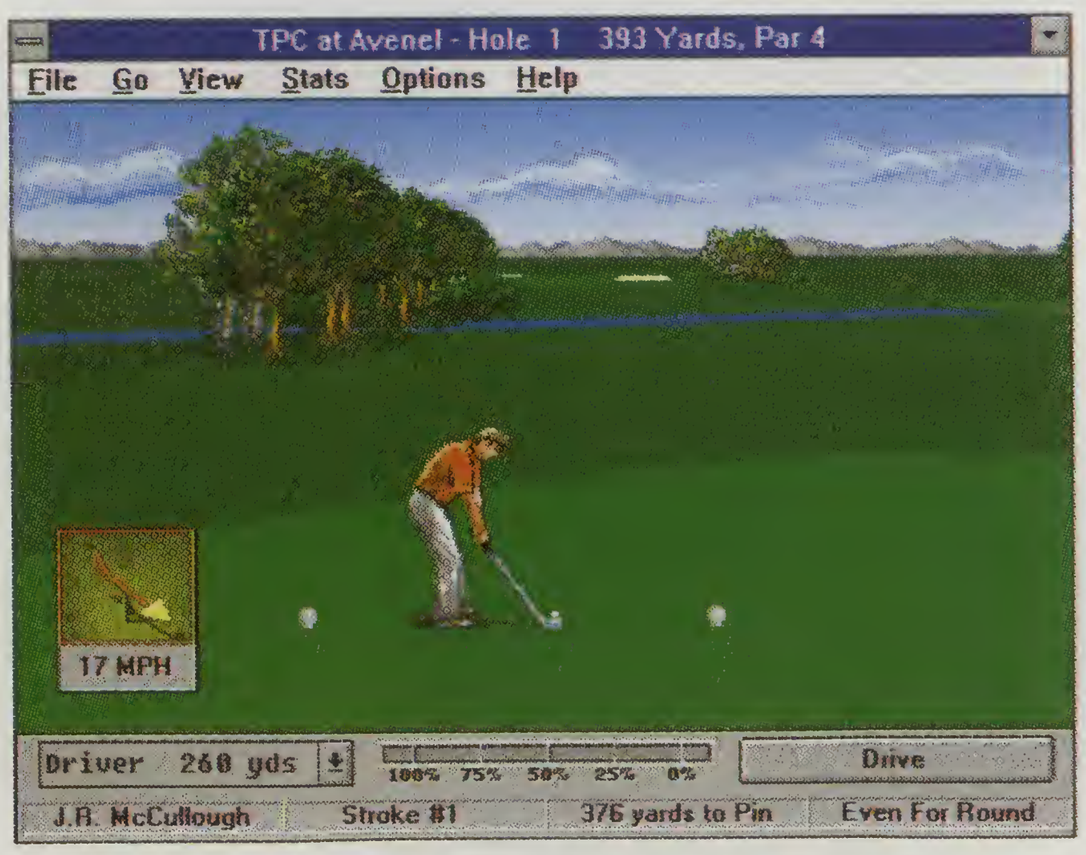

PGA Tour Golf for Windows: DOS differential

Computer game companies have known for a long while that they could reap rich rewards by feeding the marketplace a steady stream of top-flight (no pun intended) golf simulations. More than any other genre of sports simulations, the golf game must have the widest audience. Computer hacks who have never even been on a golf course can be lured by stunning graphics and state-of-the-art programming. At the other extreme are the big money boys (and girls) who routinely sneak out of the office to hit the links. Then there's the devoted weekend duffer whose day can be made by shooting par on that tough par three on the back nine of his favorite course.

With such a broad audience, game companies have done their best to compete for that business. In the past six months, four new and improved golf sims have burst on the scene, all promising greater golf realism. As the PGA Tour winds down and those in harsher climes retreat indoors, there is no better time to take a fresh look at what the market has to offer to satiate the hacker's habit.

PGA Tour Golf for Windows

Even in the midst of fierce competition from more technologically advanced games, the original version of **PGA Tour Golf** held its own. With three well-designed courses, advice from the pros, challenging greens, and a tournament mode, **PGA Tour Golf** was supremely entertaining. Now, with the corporate world embracing Microsoft Windows as a computing savior, it was just a matter of time before games were ported over to this new computing standard.

Yes, **PGA Tour Golf for Windows** runs under the Windows operating environment. Unfortunately, it doesn't take enough advantage of Windows technology to make any significant advances over its predecessor. Instead of residing in a resizable window, the playing area is fixed. Moreover, it doesn't even take up the entire screen. This is nearly acceptable on a screen with 640x480 resolution, but unnerving at anything higher.

Honestly, short of improved graphics and sound (the game now supports VGA and most major sound cards), **PGA Tour Golf for Windows** is no different than the DOS version. Fans of the original may be so smitten with the DOS version's charms that they will readily choose **PGA Tour Golf for Windows** when searching for an upgrade. My feeling is, however, that once they see the other games on the market, their loyalties will switch.

Microsoft Golf

Now *this* is how a Windows-based golf simulation should be! Imagine all the complexity and elegance of the original **Links** ported into a fully-functioning Windows environment. That's **Microsoft Golf**. It's all there—lush graphics, beautiful animation, sound effects, comments from the gallery, and an interface identical to that in **Links**. Yes, **Microsoft Golf** has the computing giant's name on the box, but Access software was a partner in this endeavor. That's why it looks so much like **Links**.

In addition to all the features mentioned above, the game makes excellent use of Windows' underlying technology. The playing area can be moved and re-sized, and all the game's supporting graphics (overhead view, golfer's stance dialogue, etc.) can also be rearranged to

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the player's satisfaction. Moreover, **Microsoft Golf** incorporates Windows' excellent online help engine, so assistance is only a keystroke or mouse click away.

I only have a couple of complaints. First, the game is fairly slow due to the demands of a multi-tasking, graphics-oriented operating environment. This game taxes the computer. It even strained my 386-40, and I have a video card with a graphics co-processor. Also, it only comes with one course. Sure, others will be released later, but compared to **PGA Tour Golf for Windows'** three courses, **Microsoft Golf** seems a bit unfinished. Nonetheless, players who have embraced Windows whole-heartedly will be amazed at the detail and playability **Microsoft Golf** has to offer. If **Microsoft Golf** is a symbol of things to come for the Windows environment, Windows converts may never look at a c-prompt again.

MicroSoft Golf (above): beautiful windows

Jack Nicklaus Signature Edition (opposite): advice from the pros

Jack Nicklaus Signature Edition

With competition as tough as it is in this market niche, **Jack Nicklaus Signature Edition (JNSE)** has staked its claim as the all-everything golf simulation. Want multiple courses? It's got 'em. Want tournament play? Got that too. What about a skins game? Check. OK - here's one for you...what about a course designer? Yep, had it from the start. Advice from the pros - geez, man, look who's on the box! OK, OK, I get the point!

The fact is, no other golf simulation can equal **JNSE** in a feature-by-feature comparison. Where's the catch? If I had to pick one, it would have to be the game's graphics. It's not that they're bad — we're talking 256-color VGA here — but in comparison to the other games in this review (even **PGA Tour Golf for Windows**), they don't measure up. They're drawn in low resolution VGA instead of the superior high-resolutions found under Windows or in **Links 386Pro**. This makes the on-screen figures look boxy.

Fortunately, the graphics don't interfere greatly with game play. Putting may be a bit more difficult than in the other games, but that is a small price to pay for the wonderful features **JNSE** has to offer.

Links 386Pro

Just when I thought DOS-based games couldn't get any better, Access released **Links 386Pro** and set the standard even higher. Words like stunning, beautiful, and enchanting come to mind when playing this game. It is truly a technical marvel. But does all of this grandeur necessarily make an enjoyable and playable game? Yes, but the admission price is steep. As the name suggests, **Links 386Pro** requires *at least* a 386 computer with two meg of RAM, 13 meg of free hard drive space, a mouse, and a Super VGA card and monitor. It works best on a 486 with eight meg of RAM and a super-fast hard drive.

Given the system requirements, what does one get with **Links 386Pro**? In addition to the features found in the original, **Links 386Pro** offers a choice of male or female golfers, flexibility in choosing a screen lay-out, vastly-improved statistics, a saved shot feature, and a bow toward modem play. Games can be recorded and sent via modem to other players. The player can then shoot a round of golf with the recorded golfer as his opponent. Access has tied into the Computer Sports Network, an online service where matches and tournaments are organized using this unique recording feature. Tournaments have also been run on mainstream information services such as CompuServe.

Links 386Pro, however, has traded game features for stunning graphics. There is no doubt that the game approaches virtual reality in its recreation of the golfing experience, but where is the tournament mode, the skins game, multiple courses? The first two are possible with the record feature, but there are still no PGA Tour professionals for the player to compete against. Additional courses will come in due time, but at a price.

For those ready to upgrade to a new golf game, the question of which to choose will ultimately come down to features. What is most important to a particular player? If he's a dedicated Windows convert, there is really no choice other than **Microsoft Golf**. **PGA Tour Golf for Windows** is a noble effort, but it frankly doesn't even belong on the same shelf with Microsoft's game. DOS-based players may already have their choice made for them as well. If the machine can't handle **Links 386Pro**, then **JNSE** is a wonderful selection.

Just because a player's system can handle **Links 386Pro**, however, doesn't mean he should run out and purchase this game. Again, the question comes down to features. **JNSE** is a blast to play. Have a few buddies over and play the skins game. There's nothing that can beat that experience. On the other hand, the gang will also be impressed with the realism that **Links 386Pro** has to offer. ❑

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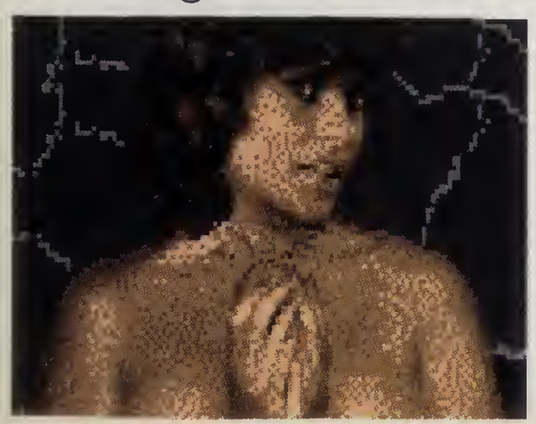

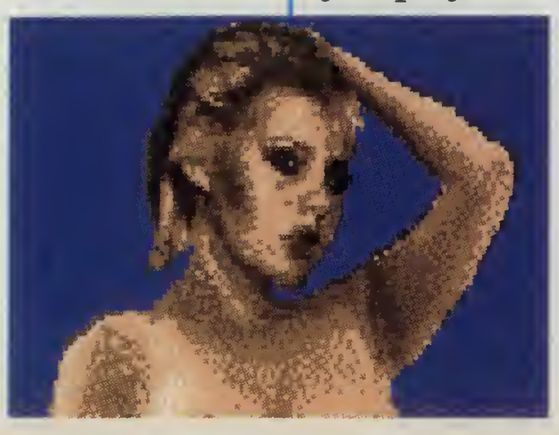

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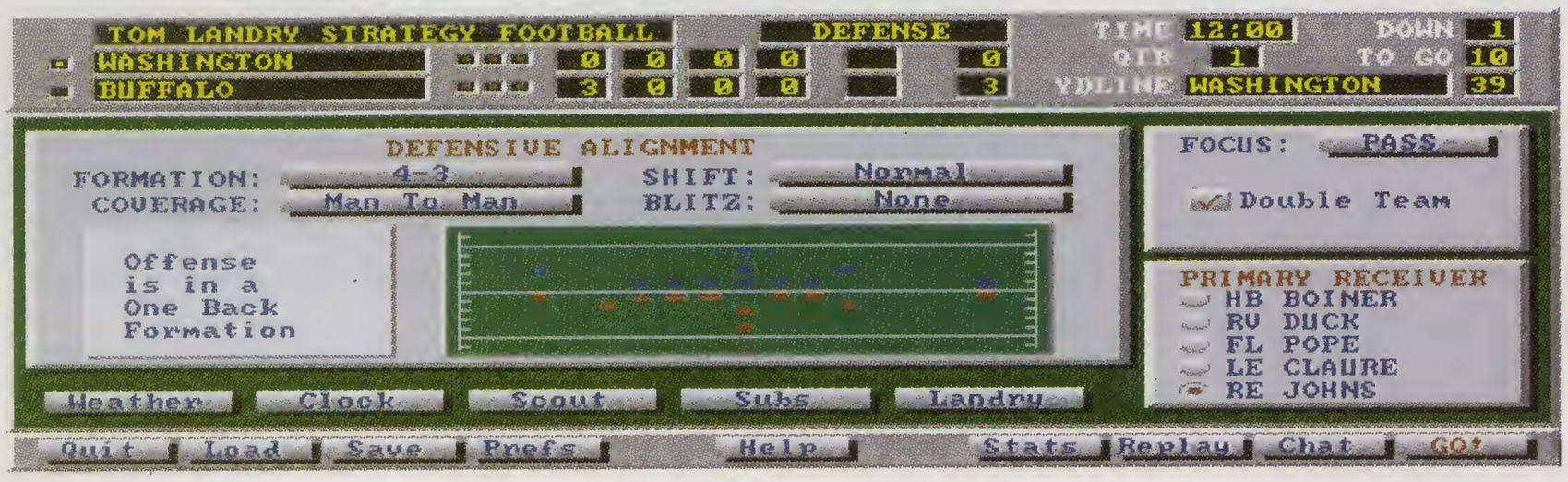
Tom Landry Strategy Football

A league of its own

By John Harrington



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Players
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Notes
Hard disk recommended for the Amiga version

Amiga specs: 1 MB RAM. Hard disk recommended.

A glance through recent issues of this magazine has just revealed, seventeen gridiron games currently on offer. To sell well, any new offering would have to be the 'complete' football game or one aimed at a hitherto neglected section of themarket. **Tom Landry Strategy Football** lacks the wealth of features to qualify as the best football game of all time, but it does seem to be the only introductory level game aimed at the strategy players rather than the arcade gamers.

Permutations

Even I, an ignorant Briton who thought double coverage on split ends meant using a shampoo and conditioner, managed to boot up and play several games without reference to the manual, thanks to the intuitive interface and the truly excellent context-sensitive online help.

Sure, the game lacks some advanced features such as a playbook editor or a schedules creator, but in the field of low complexity football games this one will probably set the standard for the current generation.

Like most football games there are three playing modes: human vs computer, computer vs computer and human vs human. The all-human mode is, frankly, a waste of time played face-to-face as the downtime for the non-phasing player is substantial. This is because the game is not played in real-time, which will also be of concern for modem play if either player likes to ponder.

Sneak peek

The computer vs computer mode is ideal for league play. With the snazzy graphics turned off the computer can rattle through a game in under 90 seconds and produce full stats, thereby allowing the player to zip through meaningless contests such as Indianapolis-San Diego without sacrificing the integrity of comprehensive end of season statistics. If only it were possible to trade players, edit player abilities and amend each team's play-calling tendencies this would be an ideal game for play-by-mail as well.

Playing against the computer is easy. Beating it is not so easy, depending on the quality of the team the computer is coaching. In keeping with the game's bias towards the novice player a few 'cheats' are available, such as being able to peek at the computer's play-calling tendencies or having the computer announce its play before the player has to call his own play.

The online help gives advice on all sorts of things, like the best sort of play to run from each type of formation. If this is not enough it is possible to call on Tom Landry himself to pick a play. Oddly enough, Tom often ignores his own advice.

Play resolution can be in fast text or graphics mode. There is no joystick waggling involved (hooray!). Neither, unfortunately, is there any opportunity to call audibles, whilst another frustrating feature is the refusal of all quarterbacks to look beyond the primary receiver, although some QB's will bootleg in preference to throwing into coverage.

Unless using the 'cheat' mode it was difficult for a Limey like myself to recognize the defensive coverages used against me, which was where the instant replay feature came in handy. It was also ideal for rubbing salt in the wounds of face-to-face opponents - an opportunity I was surprisingly able to take advantage of often when coaching Miami to shock victories over San Francisco and Dallas.

Zero rated

I suspect fervent football fans will find the game's attempts to provide silicon facsimiles of real-life players laughable but **Tom Landry Strategy Football** is not really aimed at the hard-core market. If it were, it would have a far larger playbook than the 26 passes and 11 running plays available to all teams. It would do more than just pay lip service to the importance of linemen, who are not even individually rated - which makes a nonsense of choosing whether to run inside right or left.

Fortunately there are a number of good games already available for the hard-core football fan. Newcomers hoping to progress up complexity ladder could do no better than to first graduate from the **Tom Landry Strategy Football** Academy. ❑

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Jetfighter II

The Official Strategy Guide

By Steven Wartofsky

There's a tricky balancing act to do when trying to put together a useful air combat strategy guide these days, particularly if it's based on a particular software simulation: on the one hand, the writer has to compete with the highly technical works on the subject, such as Robert Shaw's *Fighter Combat*; on the other, he has to avoid repetition of the information already available in the manual. Beyond that, there's a body of information generally present now, due to the extensive detail about air combat tactics and techniques disseminated by the large manuals accompanying a wide range of air combat simulations; anything a writer does has to presume familiarity with the essential techniques of air combat on the part of his audience.

Pete Bonanni is probably uniquely situated to deal with all the above. A trained pilot himself, as well as a veteran of pc-based air combat simulations from the early days of **Falcon** onwards, he knows both how to take the fantasy embedded in the software and connect it to the realities of real-world practice, and how to discuss real-world technicalities in a way that can easily be brought to bear on the limits and context of flying software.

Jetfighter II - the Official Strategy Guide benefits immensely from being written by this guy, in other words. As a simulation generally considered less 'realistic' than most, in Bonanni's hands **Jetfighter II** suddenly takes on dimensions sim pilots might not have thought possible. For instance: `You will notice that the F-23 has very benign stall characteristics. This is due to the swept wings. Swept-wing aircraft usually stall in a nose-up-to-level attitude rather than pitching down into a steep dive like a

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straight-wing aircraft.' (p32) Or, `The good news on strafe and rocket deliveries in **Jetfighter II** is that these attacks, even more than bombs, mirror the difficulty level of the same types of attacks in a real fighter. For this reason alone I like to strafe and shoot rockets in **Jetfighter II**. In the real jet we call it 'pipper discipline' (p113). Such statements are characteristic of the book throughout, in that they blend the writer's technical knowledge with understanding of the features of the simulation seamlessly into vivid commentary that's both useful and fun to read.

The book is mainly divided into seven parts, and covers everything from the fundamentals of aerodynamics to the basic elements of effective mission planning, with all the main aspects of air combat training -- maneuvers, defensive and offensive flying, weapons, and countermeasures management -- discussed in enough detail to inform the reader without overwhelming him or her.

The basics of Shaw's classic work are all covered without the lapses into aerodynamic physics the latter writer includes as part of his more serious training program, and the particulars of air-to-air and air-to-ground weapons use are focused on effective techniques relevant to **Jetfighter II**. Bonanni covers the more abstract concepts behind effective tactical play, in other words, from a gamer pilot's rather than an engineer's perspective, by organizing his discussion around what will make sense in the context of this particular simulation.

After the main discussions of techniques, perhaps the most practically useful aspect of the book is the careful elaboration on each of the original **Jetfighter II**'s 125 missions (too bad the book didn't wait until the new advanced missions disk came out!). Since neither the manual nor the software include much more than basic information on the missions, these extra hints and tips on tactics will prove invaluable to those new to **Jetfighter II** who might feel frustrated with the guesswork of choosing good missions and proper tactics. Beyond that, there's even some discussion of the most common gameplay questions asked, which helps clarify and solve the kinds of problems users might encounter either during installation or play. Technical issues relating to software use are covered in this discussion.

Since I feel I know **Jetfighter II** pretty well by now (it remains one of my favorite sims), perhaps the best part of *Jetfighter II - the Official Strategy Guide* for me is not the detailed and useful gameplay assistance, however, but the anecdotes that introduce each of the sections of the book. These anecdotes are neither old war stories grown long of tooth, nor Hollywood Tom Cruise missives full of arrogant macho male glory, but rather wonderful autobiographical tales of imminent woe, told by someone highly aware of the risks and rapid turn of events that take place even during 'mere' fighter training.

The reader comes away with a clearer sense of a real-world context not often discussed for air combat simulations, ie the arena of modern jetfighter training. Bonanni's narration of memorable moments from his experience as trainer and trainee are personable and unforgettable. ❑

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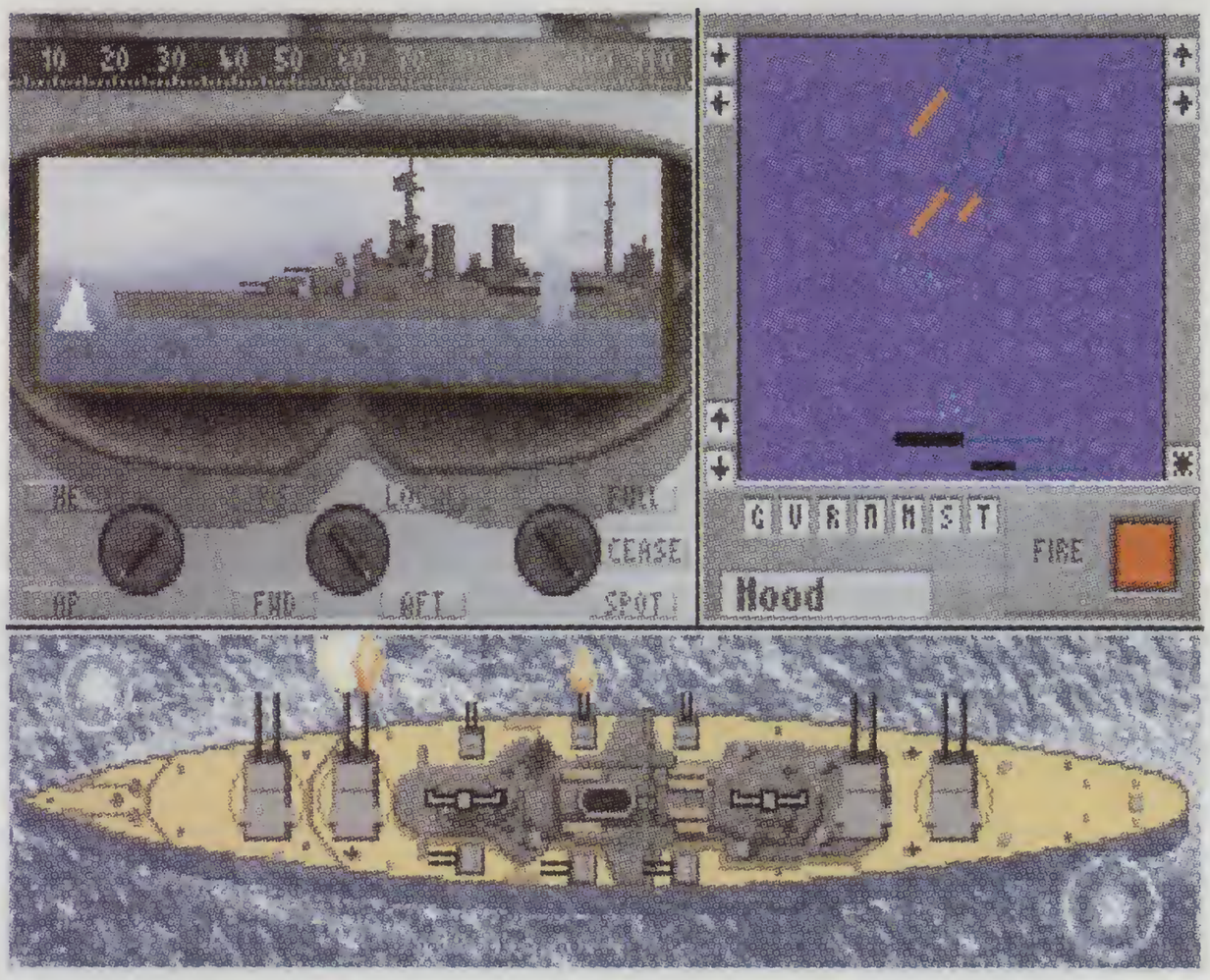
Reader Service No. 12

Great Naval Battles

North Atlantic 1939-1945

By Peter Szymonik



A number of new fleet-level naval simulations have hit the market this Fall. While **Carrier Strike** (also by SSI) and **Carriers at War** (SSG) cover the Pacific Theatre of Operations, **Great Naval Battles** by SSI covers naval battles in the North Atlantic during World War Two from 1939-1943.

Great Naval Battles covers a unique period in naval operations history when conventional naval strategy was constantly being re-examined and challenged by advances in both weaponry and technology. Ship-board electronics, radio communications, and radar are just a few of the new innovations that were just beginning to take hold during this period. Because of this, **Great Naval Battles** is unique among the current crop of naval simulations since it places most of its emphasis on ship-to-ship combat as battleships slug it out in the open water. Also, unlike the other games this is very much a 'hands-on', rather than strategic simulation. Played on the top level, the player assumes the role of a fleet admiral and directs an entire campaign with scores of ships and scattered task forces. This is a campaign game in every meaning of the word and will take many days if not weeks to complete. On this level things are fairly complex. The player has to keep on eye on weather conditions, base and port activities, convoy shipments, patrols, repair facilities, and even political events. But the real heart of this simulation lies in the tactical combat.

Both sides have a vast arsenal capable of boring holes in opposition defences: battleships, pocket battleships (or battle cruisers for the British), heavy cruisers, light cruisers, destroyers, reconnaissance planes, torpedo bombers (English only), and dive bombers (Germans only).

In addition to the full Campaign game there are ten tactical scenarios provided, including a simple duel of batteries between the Bismark and the Price of Wales (good as an introduction to the game). There are several 'points of view' offered but the main display on the tactical level is the Flag Bridge. This display shows the area immediately surrounding the selected ship and can be customized. Aerial operations in **Great Naval Battles** are pretty much limited to reconnaissance, but planes can also be used to enhance the gunnery of their mother ships.

There are only two ways to end a scenario. Either all of the enemy's ships are sunk, or the two fleets lose contact with each other. If either one of these happens, the game determines which victory conditions have been met and displays the result as a German or English Marginal, Tactical, or Decisive Victory, or a Draw.

The English score points for successful convoy missions and for sinking German ships. The Germans score points for sinking Allied shipping and for sinking British vessels. Since most English shipping did make it to their destinations, the British strategy should focus on sinking the major German surface ships, while the Germans should focus on taking out as many merchant ships as possible.

The game comes with a detailed and fairly hefty player's guide covering all aspects of the game, but surprisingly there is no tutorial. This is a glaring omission making the game's learning curve fairly steep. What the game lacks by way of a tutorial it partly makes up for in its accompanying historical booklet and on-screen historical information in the form of pull-down menus. The manual is loaded with information and does a great job of providing a background material for the game's scenarios.

At times the game does seem to move a bit too slowly, but this inherent in most naval games and should not deter those interested in the subject. It takes time to make contact with the enemy, but once that happens all hell breaks loose and the game becomes extremely fast-paced. In many ways **Great Naval Battles** is like a bigger (in every sense) version of Microprose's **Silent Service II**, hardly surprising as both games share the same designer.

The graphics are good but not exceptional. I would have liked a better screen font - the one the program uses is a bit too blocky. The opposing ships are invariably some distance away, the resultant lack of detail makes them look like blots on the landscape. This is somewhat disarming when one has to imagine that such a blot is supposed to be the mighty Bismarck. These quibbles aside, **Great Naval Battles** can be recommended to anyone looking for a well researched 'hands-on' naval simulation. ❑

Designed by
Roy Gibson

Published by
SSI

Systems
PC

Graphics
VGA

Supports
Mouse, AdLib, Soundblaster, Roland

Notes
386/20 Mhz minimum strongly recommended. SSI plan to release 3 add-on disks for this simulation: Super Ships of the Atlantic features ships both sides thought about building but didn't. Soon they will be here, though, included in set of new scenarios plus a 'what if' campaign.A scenario builder is also scheduled for release. This will include a 'Captain's Campaign'. Finally there's America in the Atlantic, a new set of scenarios featuring US ships that could be found in the Atlantic during WWII

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COMMANDER CRUNCH REPORTS FROM

THE HANGAR

Crunch expands with add-on disks for Gunship 2000 and takes up construction work with the Red Baron Mission Builder

If you've used a few flight simulators for any length of time, you may find yourself waking up early Saturday mornings sometimes thinking, 'Kill, kill, kill. Boom! Smash! Crash! is that all there is to life?" This is clearly a sign that it's time to take a nice walk in the park. Or maybe russle up some onions, brie and salsa and make a killer omelette. Something like that.

On the other hand, you might yearn for further work in the flight simulation arena involving construction as well as destruction (put them together and what've you got? Deconstruction! Yay!). In what way could any air combat simulation be conceived of as representation of constructive activity (unless the puritanical urge to purge the 'not-you' is strong within you)? Aside from all the work involved in learning complex systems, developing effective strategies, amassing complex knowledge about one of the most technologically advanced aspects of a post-industrial culture, I mean?

Bring on the mission builders! Bring out the construction sets! There's the obvious answer. And, as if by magic, or perhaps under the dazed influence of witnessing **Falcon 3.0**'s incredible success, two major air combat sim designers have done just that.

Let me assure readers right off that neither Dynamix' **Red Baron Mission Builder** nor Microprose's **Gunship 2000 Islands & Ice Scenario Disk and Mission Builder** (the latter title ranking right up there with *Who is Harry Kellerman and Why is He Saying all those Bad Things About Me?* as one of the longest titles in modern media history) will require the investment of time that, for instance, the **Planet Editor** for **Universal Military Simulator II** does.

Jetfighter II Advanced Mission Disk

Saints alive

One of the first things that scares many of us off the software construction set idea is that, more often than not, it's implemented in a way as to suggest, 'You users think you know how to design a computer game? Okay! Here's the tools to do it with'. In other words, a construction set or mission builder frequently requires the patience of the Saints of Nineveh, the free time of your typical 3rd century BC Mandarin, and the application of someone engaged in programming missile control sequences in Ada for the Pentagon in order to deal with properly. **The Harpoon Scenario Editor** proved it could be otherwise, and more importantly here, **Falcon 3.0** incorporated mission-building elements into its design so effectively that it doesn't even feel like mission-building when used.

Red Baron Mission Builder (**RBMB**) and **'Gunship 2000 Islands & Ice**' are both even more elegant in design than any of the above. These mission builders are clearly intended for an audience eager to get back to the action with a minimum of fuss, but at the same time with fresh enough results that the designers seem worth time spent with them.

Let's start with '**RBMB**'. Dynamix have gracefully included yet another update to the original **Red Baron** program, that brings '**RB**' up to the technological level that the latest version of **Aces of the Pacific** (1.2) provides: good dual joystick control, even smoother animation, and even more careful modeling of historical aircraft performance, with opportunities to replay botched missions without having to go through any more rigamarole than pushing a button upon crash.

Beyond that, **RBMB** allows entry into a simple yet effective designer, that provides a hard-wired context of historically-situated ground-based units and airfields, within which the designer's imagination is entirely free to roam. Types of planes, formations, weather conditions, routes of both player and opponent planes, numbers of units, starting and ending locations, historical

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maps and locations, are all configurable at the press of a button. A simple memory meter indicates how much room is left for further design (rather complex and busy missions can be configured up), and there's room for the designer to write up any kind of mission text they'd like to include as context for the custom-built mission.

The Gunship 2000 Mission Builder (**GS2KMB**) provides more flexibility without yet proving daunting. Here, the designer has control over all of the above plus control over location of ground forces and targets. Within the database appropriate for the particular theatre being built for, all choices of both computer-run opponents and player options are available. What this means is that it's possible to set up surprise attacks at various locations.

Designer targets

Since the **GS2K** system is generally more dynamic than Dynamix's mission builder (the player always gets to formulate routes of ingress and egress, for instance), the designer is much more engaged in 'fighting the imagined future player' when constructing a custom scenario than in **RBMB**. Moreover, since units can be set up at certain locations but designated mobile, missions can be constructed for play by the designer himself, without fear of knowing entirely what to expect (one of the biggest weaknesses of any game construction system).

The **GS2K Mission Builder** requires that the player achieve a certain level of competence (Commissioned Officer with a Flight crew of four) prior to access; this shouldn't be a problem for most **GS2K** fans, but newcomers might be frustrated.

One last notably nice feature of the **GS2K** design system is that, if the designer wants to speed up the process, a few choice ground components can be specifically selected, and then the computer can be asked to 'fill' the scenario with randomized elements of its own choice, much the way it does during the normal campaign mode of play. After such a fill, items can still be deleted or moved if any seem contrary to the designer's wishes.

All in all, both mission builders serve their respective simulations quite well.

Network solution

The most exciting aspect of these builders is that they result in quite small, efficient files which can easily be uploaded to or downloaded from any BBS or network system. A kind of extended multi-player situation is thus provided, in the sense that members of said BBS or network can trade missions with each other simply and easily. More importantly, perhaps, both mission builders lend themselves quite well to producing scenarios useful for setting up contests between players.

A mission can be created and then scoring can be used to see who (other than the designer, of course) is most effective at handling that sort of mission. Missions can be refined to cater to the particular strengths or weaknesses of all the players in a particular group. Teams of players could be imagined, focusing on one or another aspect of such group play (in **RB** it might have to do with flying a particular side, in **GS2K** it might involve choosing to participate as a member of the Heavy or Light group in the flight), and set against each other. In other words, even without direct connection (and the frustrations, foibles and expense that that can sometimes entail), multi-player gaming is much enhanced by the introduction of these two systems. Now that's constructive activity, ain't it?

Raspberry crunch

On to other matters. I often skip playing **Jetfighter II** (**JFII**) for a very simple reason: it requires fishing the **JFII** boot disk out from under the raspberry pie leavings on top of the computer. No more - almost - with the recently released **Jetfighter II Advanced Mission Disk**. We've got QEMM compatibility (with one small caveat), rapid boot-up on a standard system, more use of EMS, another 125 missions on top of the 125 originally included, and an F-22 to add to the larder (much faster than the F-23, and more maneuverable; the F-22 plays F-16 to the F-23's F-15, to put this in short-hand).

The missions are a good deal tougher, so **Jetfighter II** veterans are not going to remain the air combat cream puffs they've been for long once this thing's installed.

And, thankfully, flight performance has been improved across the whole F-line so that there are enough realistic features, such as loss of speed in turns, changes in AoA below reasonably correct airspeeds during landings, and differences in missile effectiveness depending on range to target, to make Jetfighter II more than a pretty face and more like a competitor in the current air combat simulation arena.

Despite all that (and the book by Pete Bonnanni on **Jetfighter II**, covered separately in this issue by my evil twin), the thing I continue to like most about **JF II** is that it's a wonderful game, easy to get into, great to load up and fly around in for a few minutes while the wife puts the last touches on her latest architectural design just prior to take-off for the movies, and mildly visceral in the way all the planes fly. Maybe I just like flying under the San Mateo Bridge, who knows? In any event, sometimes a quickie's all you have time for, and that sometimes seems all too prevalent these days (you'd think a global recession would help somewhat, eh?

But no - now we have to work harder, be more productive - no wonder it's nice to blow a bunch of stuff up every now and then! ❑

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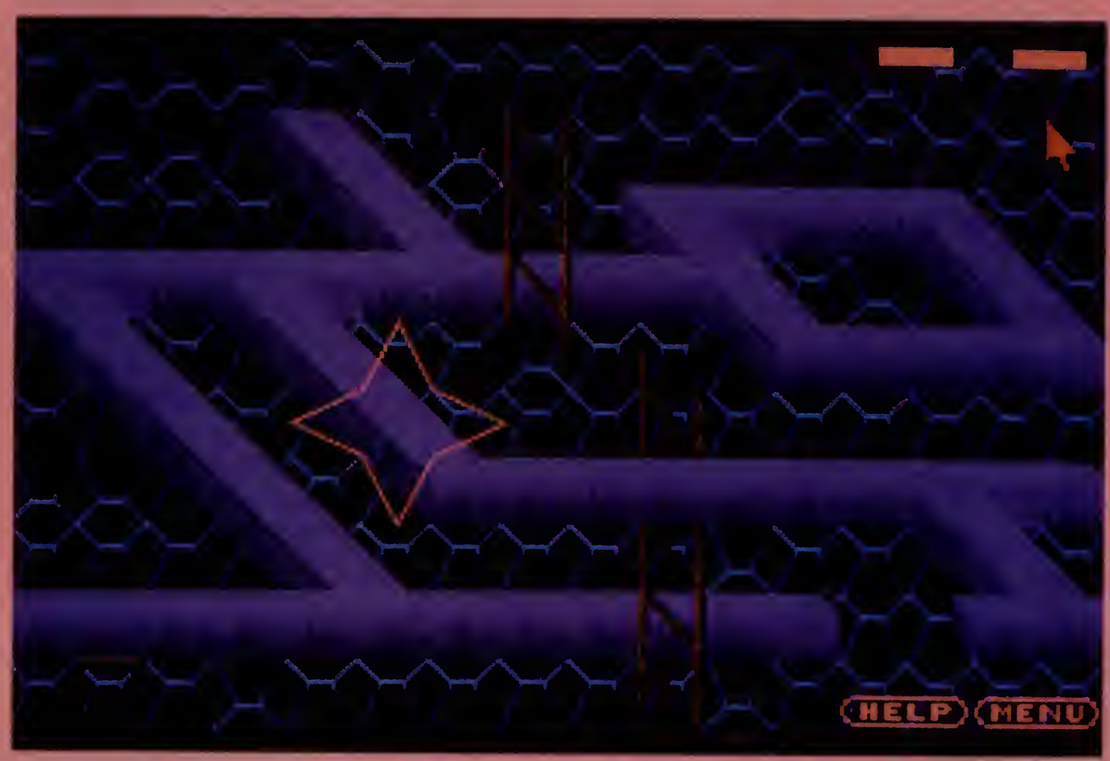

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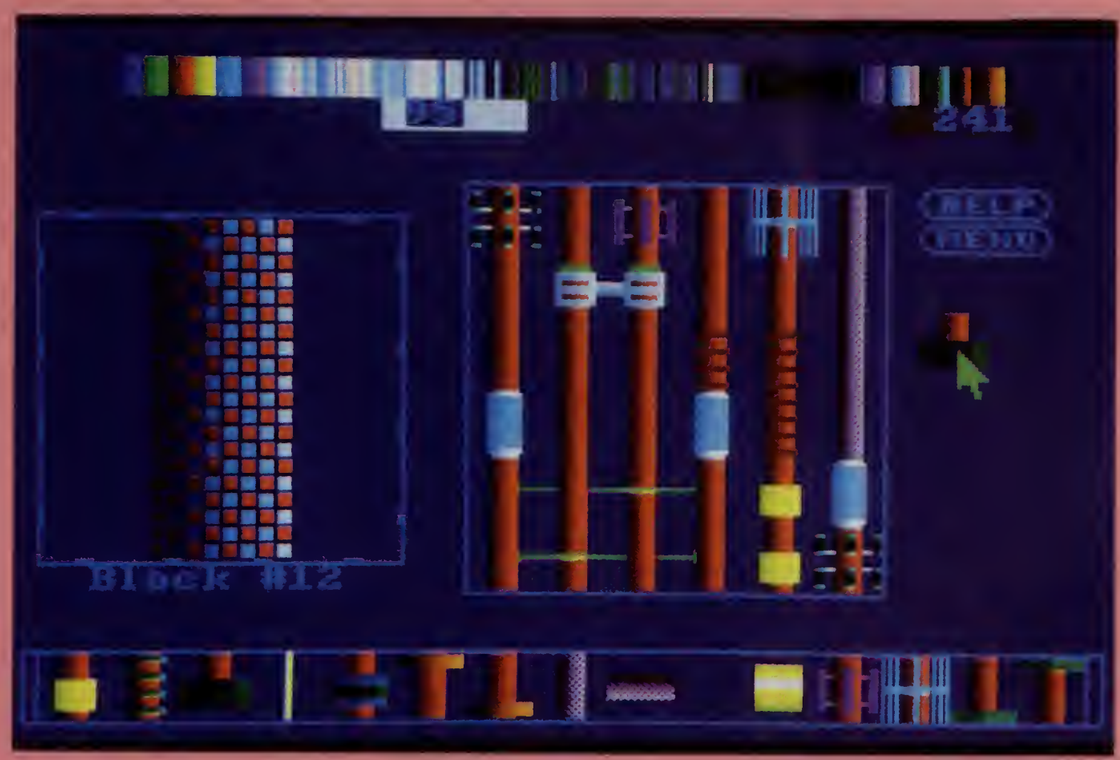

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Ad Lib Gold Card

16 bits and what do you get?

By Michael Cassara

The first affordable soundcards produced for PC's had one thing in common with each other: they sounded like someone's garage experiment. Some great things have come from garage experiments, but sound cards do not rank among them. Ad Lib's second generation card the Ad Lib Gold has improved the situation by bringing 16 bit stereo sound to the PC.

Bits and chips

Previously almost all sound cards suffered from 8 bit digital to analog converters which limited the quality of the sound that they produced. Even though a few cards began to use a digital sampling rate of 44.1 KHz, samples still sounded poor. Considering that the music industry has had 16 bit sound for at least five years, it is about time that someone was thoughtful enough to bring it to the PC.

The first thing noticeable upon opening the box was a big manual (usually a bad sign) three disks and the card itself. Opening the plastic I noticed the that the card is yes, gold in color and will fit into an 8 bit slot - a useful feature for those older PC's.

So doing the sensible thing when trying out a new piece of hardware, I removed all the peripherals from my computer and followed the instructions in the manual until the software took over with a well written installation menu program.

I waited about five minutes while the computer did the work and swapped a couple of disks when prompted to do so. I then tried to test the card using the test program that came on disk and got my first error. The program had failed to add two lines to my autoexec file that

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the test program needed. So I jumped ahead in the book until I found that the lines I had been missing could be easily added by me. The test program worked fine and told me exactly what was in my computer, *nothing!* So I added back a joystick and a mouse.

One of the nice features I found is that almost all aspects of the card are controlled through software instead of hardware. There is almost nothing more frustrating than ripping open your computer then putting it all back starting a game and finding out that you switched the wrong jumper.

So now having tested the card I was ready to hear what Ad Lib has said would be the next standard in the sound card market.

Juke Box jury

Fortunately Ad Lib provides the Juke Box Gold Playback program as part of the software package that comes with the card. Especially so since few vendors have yet produced games that take advantage of stereo sound. I loaded the program and had it play the first song of about twenty on the list. The sound was superb, in fact it was hard to believe that this sound was coming from the card I just plugged into my PC.

Another useful feature Ad Lib has provided is a 13K TSR that allows you to pop up a menu and change any of the aspects of the cards sound performance at any time, even during game play. The TSR is not required since the card remembers what volume it was left at when using the TSR.

The TSR can then be removed enabling memory intensive games to be loaded up.

Ad Lib obviously had the general market in mind when developing this card since the speakers I used are about the most common ones in PC useage. The sound was rich and clean, clean, clean. No clicks, no hisses and no static. Like a breath of fresh air, the sound flowed through my room. All this sound can be attributed to some new sound filters, both double oversampling and undersampling digital filters have been added.

As well as a host of hardware treats that no other single card can offer.

The reason behind ALG stereo sound is a new specially designed Yamaha FM sound chip that has twice as many melodic voices as the original Al Lib cards YM3812 chip.

A flexible friend

The new chip is fully compatible with the old Ad Lib chip yet offers sound that even two YM 3812's used together could not provide. Having a digital sampling rate at 44.1KHz allows for playback of sound in stereo at the threshold of human hearing, about 22KHz. Some other cards tout the ability to record at 44.1KHz but most can only do it in monaural mode.

For both programers and consumers there is no more flexible choice on the market than the Ad Lib Gold. However, anyone thinking of buying the card purely for gaming purposes might want to check the level of support offered by software companies.

If this support is not forthcoming, then the Ad Lib Gold will provide little more than the original card at twice the price. ❑

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Felony	$12
Free DC	$24
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Gold Rush	$15
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Leisure Suit Lrry 3	$24
Leisure Suit Lrry 5	$34
Leisure Suit Lrry Bundle	$39
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Space Quest 5	$39
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'PIRATES GOLD' lets you become a swashbuckling pirate in the 17th century Caribbean. Expands on the original with more opportunities to gain treasure, power, and prestige. Features swordfighting & combat capabilities, realistic digitized speech, & support for all major sound boards. **$34**

'SPEAR OF DESTINY' is a Castle Wolfenstein 3D graphic adventure. Encounter well trained enemy soldiers, secret doorways, gruesome mutants and powerful bosses in first person perspective. Features 20 complete floors, 4 levels of difficulty, digitized stereo sound effects, & multiple saved games. **$37**

IBM SPORTS

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'SPACEWARD HO!' takes you to the stars as you explore and conquer the galaxy. You allocate funds & resources to build armadas, inhabit & terraform planets, research new technologies. Features an adjustable galaxy size, number of players up to 19, network and modem play. **$38**

'CARRIERS AT WAR' brings to life six crucial carrier battles of WWII; Pearl Harbor, Coral Sea, Midway, Eastern Shores, Santa Cruz, and Great Marianas Turkey Shoot. Seek out and destroy enemy carriers, fleets, and airforces. Features hundreds of individually modeled ships & aircraft from that period. **$39**

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'TRISTAN PINBALL' brings you all the excitment of playing real pinball. Flip and nudge your way to the highest score possible using great features from traditional pinball games. Features authentic ball action, wild pinball devices, rocket flippers, thumper bumpers, multi-ball, extra ball, and stereo sound. **$39**

IBM TRADITIONAL

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'FLIGHTSTICK' is one of the most popular joysticks available today. Features total 360 degree cursor control, greater durability, a contoured pistol grip handle with audio and tactile feedback firebuttons, and separate throttle control. **$37**

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IBM TRADITIONAL

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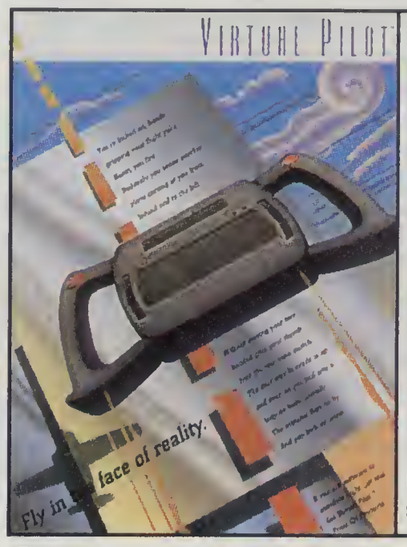

'VIRTUAL PILOT' is a flight yoke that mounts on your desk and plugs into your IBM compatible. Features left, right, front, & back views accesible at the touch of a button, flap & gear controls, tactile fire buttons under your thumbs, precise trim control, and thumb-screw terminals for easy installation. **$54**

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'LINKS 386 PRO' offers **Super VGA** graphics and advanced features designed for your 386 or 486. New features include computer opponent, save game option that allows your friends to play against you in an existing game, prerecorded games from worthy opponents, and many game modes. **$42**

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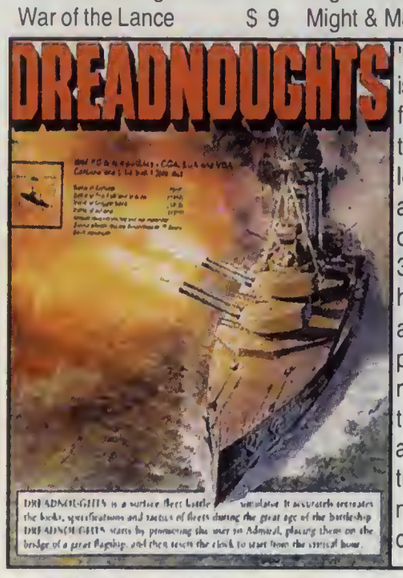

'DREADNOUGHTS' is a WWI surface fleet battle simulator. It recreates the look, specificatons, and tactics of fleet combat. Features 3D views, comprehensive manuals and sea charts, a potent English command parser, one or two player mode and computer controlled ships, gunnery and damage control. **$42**

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Matrix Cubed	$32
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Megatraveller 2	$19
Megatraveller 3	$39
Midwinter 1	$12
Might & Magic 1 or 2	$12
Might & Magic 3	$38
Might & Magic 4 or 5	$46
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Wizardry Trilogy	$32
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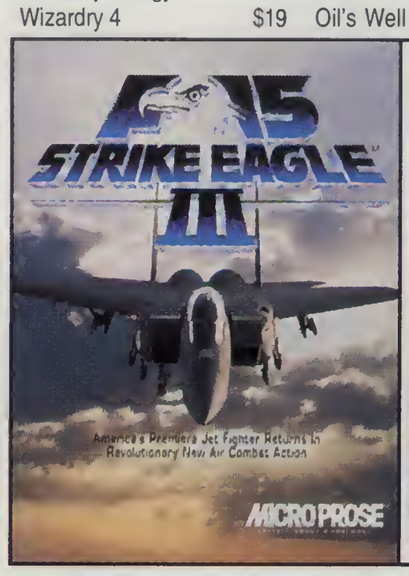

'F15 STRIKE EAGLE 3' will challenge even seasoned pilots. Includes a new visual system that blends 3D polygon and bit-mapped graphics. Features campaign mode, 2 player head-to-head by modem, and 2 player cooperative in separate planes or in the same F15. **$44**

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'TASK FORCE 1942' gives you a chance to command a fleet of destroyers, cruisers, and battleships against aggressive enemy forces in the South Pacific. Features night combat, realistic weather conditions, blinding explosions, flares, torpedoes, ability to send orders to ships & convoys, and VGA graphics. **$39**

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'SECOND CONFLICT' is a windows game of interstellar strategy and conquest. Test your skill against friends or the computer in one of 6 exciting scenarios or create your own with the built in editor. Choose between warships, stealthships, missiles, & transports in your quest to rule the galaxy. **$34**

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'THEATRE OF WAR' is a real-time game of strategy and conquest on a chess-like board. Features Super VGA graphics in 640x480, ray-traced 3D game pieces, modem play, 1 or 2 player game, music that varies with the mood of the game, configurable game board up to 50x50 tiles. **←$32 ← BUY 2 GET 1**

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Sim Life	$41
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'SEX OLYMPICS' combines sexual, tongue-in-cheek humor, adult graphics, unusual sound effects and an icon driven point-and-click interface to create a game that is a little different than your usual fare. Features 3 levels of game play, and objects that change location each time you play. **$24**

'PC SYMPHONY' is an 8 bit Adlib compatible sound card for your PC. Features 11-voice FM music, built in 4 watt power amplifier, simultaneous 9 voice, 6 melody, & 5 rhythm sound generation, hardware volume control to 4 ohm & 8 ohm speaker/ earphone output, & internal speaker output. **$37**

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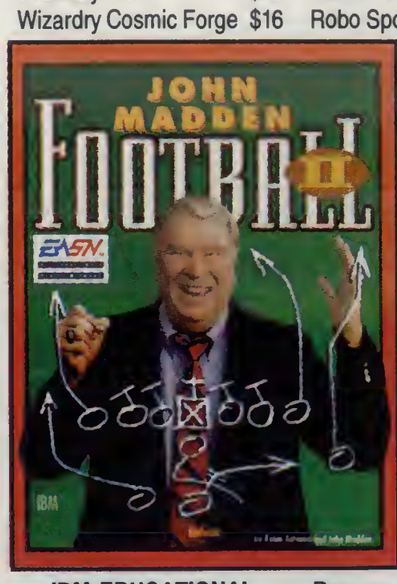

'JOHN MADDEN FOOTBALL 2' improves on one of the most popular football games available with, play-by-play analysis, an icon menu, instant replay, and even help from Madden himself. Other features include player ratings, match-ups injuries, field conditions, & ability to design plays. **←$32 ← BUY 2 GET 1**

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'MEDIA CONCEPT' is an 8 bit sound blaster compatible sound card. Features 11-voice FM music, digitized voice input, digitized voice output, full duplex MIDI interface, 4 watts per channel output, volume control, microphone and line in jacks, a joystock port, and Hardware decompression. **$84**

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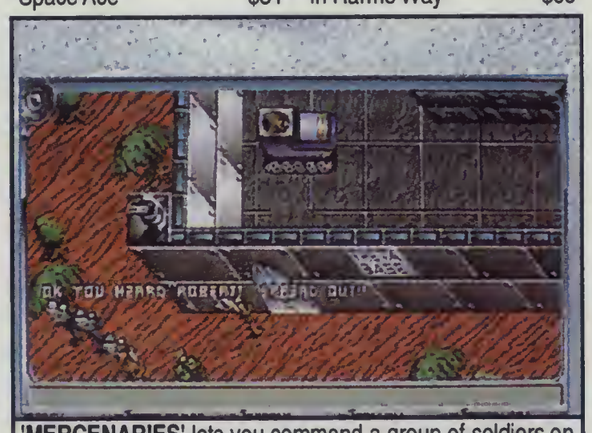
'PATRIOT' is the definitive land warfare simulation for the PC. In this initial battleset, coalition forces meet with the defiant troops of Saddam Hussein. Command over 2000 units from either side. Features 256 color VGA graphics, state-of-the-art database, interface & mapping. **←$44 ← BUY 2 GET 1**



'MERCENARIES' lets you command a group of soldiers on interplanetary combat missions. Each mercenary, civilian, and alien has their own personality. Produce your own missions with the built in scenario editor. **BUY 2 GET 1 ←$38**

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'RAGNAROK' lets you experience the vast, unbounded world of Norse Mythology. Acquire the arcane skills of polymorph and transformation in order to defeat Surtr and his hordes of Demons. Includes 100 action-packed realms, over 200 magical artifacts, 200 distinct races, & VGA graphics. **$38**

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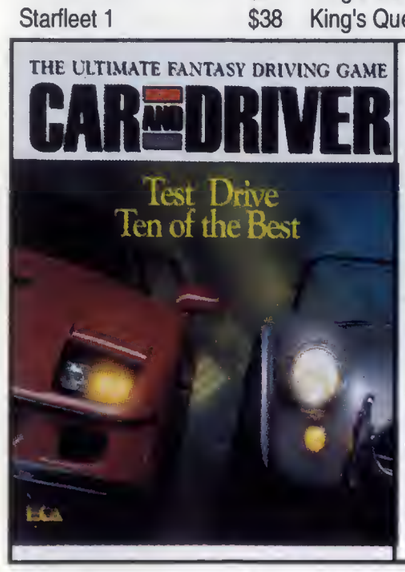

'CAR & DRIVER' lets you test drive 10 of the best performance cars like the Porshe 959, Shelby Cobra, and Ferrari Testarossa. Features 10 different tracks, bit-mapped landscapes, drive in any direction or off road, head to head via modem, instant replay, and 256 color VGA. ←**$38**
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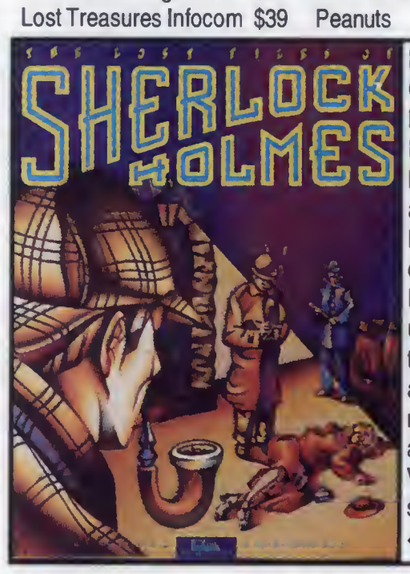

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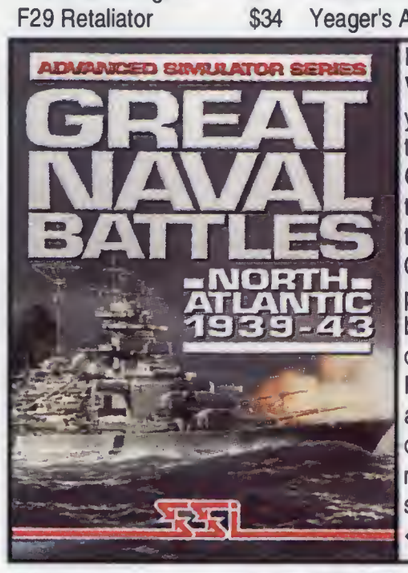

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